

The Vet – Prologue

I had almost 20 years in when they determined I had type II diabetes. Typically, the diagnosis would get you a near automatic medical discharge. That Captain said as much.

“Doc, give me a break...please. I’ll be retiring in 4 months. I’ll do everything you tell me to do if you can see your way clear to let me finish my enlistment and retire.”

“Normally Sergeant, I wouldn’t even consider it. The regulations don’t give me much leeway. I’ll make you a deal and if you keep up your end, I help you out. Agreed?”

“Yes sir, what do I need to do?”

“One, you need to take the prescription I’ll give you. Two, you need to drop 30 pounds. Three, you need more exercise and have 3 months to pass the fitness test. Fail and you’ll be out, immediately, regardless of how many days you are away from retirement. Do you think you can do that?”

“Captain, I don’t know if I can do it. I can try sir and believe me when I say that I’ll make it my short term life’s goal.”

“Sergeant, get this prescription filled at an off base pharmacy. I’ll see you in 30 days to determine how it’s going. I’ll be out in 6 months myself so I can understand your request. Fail me or yourself and you’ll be gone in 60 seconds.”

“Yes Sir.”

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Thirty days later, I was down 12 pounds, had increased the length of my jog from half a mile to three miles. My blood sugar was within the normal range of 70-110.

“Good work Sergeant; you’ve bought yourself another 30 days. You’re in better shape, I see.”

“Sir, I’m up to a 3 mile jog daily and have a friend who is a trainer. In another month, I’ll be close, if not actually able, to pass the fitness test.”

“At the moment, your blood sugar level is within the normal range. Your hemoglobin a1c, is still high, but down slightly. Our goal here is to have it in the below 6 range. See you in 30 days.”

“Yes Sir.”

Four months later, 35 pounds lighter, able to jog almost five miles and having actually passed the fitness test, unofficially, I retired with my 20 years in. I had completed my Bachelor's degree in Liberal Arts two years previously and was an experienced jet engine mechanic/shop supervisor. I thought getting a job would be easy...man, was I wrong.

I ended up on the farm I had been raised on. When our parents died, Jack and I had inherited the half section of prime crop land. He'd sold his half off, leaving me with the other quarter section and a hired man and his wife living at the homestead farming the remaining 160 acres of crop land and tending to the remaining livestock. The second floor of the old house had been converted into sort of an apartment before the folks died and Dad's hired man and his wife had lived there.

"Hi, I'm Mark, the owner."

"Mr. Bacon, nice to meet you. Are you moving back to the farm?"

"Yes, Mac, I am. I'll live here although I not sure how much help I'll be. For the present, you and your wife are welcome to continue as you have been. My brother said you've been managing the farm and that I should ask you to bring me up to speed."

"Okay Mr. Bacon, I'll..."

"Make it Mark, please."

"Mark it is. As you know, your brother had a small corporation established and put your portion of the estate in the name of the corporation. My wife Sally and I have worked these past 19 years here on the farm. The bookkeeper in town, Otto Henry, keeps the books and files the tax returns. Your father's attorney, Jacob Smith, Otto Henry plus your brother Jack have served as the officers of the firm. I assume that Jack generally filled you in on the company?"

"That part yes. He said he didn't pay much attention to how you were managing the farm and assured me whatever you'd been doing was generating a reasonable net profit."

"I thought so Mark. We have three 40 acre fields plus the homestead and pasture. They've been planted in corn, canola and alfalfa rotating the corn and canola and re-seeding the alfalfa as necessary. I extract the canola oil and feed the meal to the livestock along with a blended feed from the elevator in town based on the corn, canola meal and other grains we don't grow.

"I've been selling the extracted canola oil although you could set up a biodiesel production unit if you chose. Sally cares for the chickens, sells the eggs and butchers the fryers every year. There are ten sows and a new boar so we sell, on average, just short of 200 head of hogs a year. The cattle herd is fairly small, ten milking cows and a bull.

We've been splitting a beef each year with Jack and selling him 2 hogs. Sally and I get the other side of beef, 2 hogs and half the chickens she butchers. Jack buys the other half of the butchered chickens. The garden is probably the same as it was before you went off to the military. Sally cans the vegetables and fruits. Jack and Mary buy about half of the canned goods too. That about covers it."

"Very good Mac. I thank you and Sally for doing a good job. You will stay on, won't you?"

"We decided we'd accept the offer if it was made; so yes, we'll stay. Sally cleans the house monthly and when Jack called to say you were coming, she made it ready. What's your wife's name and how many children do you have?"

"Uh, I'm single Mac and no kids that I know of. I retired with 20 in because of diabetes. It's under control now so I'm not disabled or anything. Pretty hard to find a job given the current economy and after six months of looking, I decided to come back here and get back to my roots."

"What did you do in the military?"

"Jet engine mechanic and later supervised the engine rebuild shop."

"Combat?"

"Very little. Desert Storm and two tours in Iraq. Mechanic during Desert Storm and Supervisor in Iraq. No combat in Desert Storm and just putting up with the occasional attack by insurgents during the two tours. Not many hobbies per se, I hunt a little and enjoy the shooting sports."

"Plenty of pheasants here each year. Do you hunt birds?"

"When I got the chance I did."

"There's a small herd of deer in that forest behind the farm. Sometimes see a deer or three out in the fields just before hunting season. I swear they can read; they all disappear just before season opens. What did you mean by the shooting sports?"

"I don't compete because I'm not that good. Every year I was in I bought one firearm or more. I started with a Winchester model 70 in .308. You can shoot .308 in a 7.62x51mm NATO chamber but not the other way around. The military ammo is longer but has a lower chamber pressure. Anyway, my first handgun was a Colt M1911A1. I bought a Remington 870 the next year and ordered a barrel with the rifle sight and had the chamber reamed out to 3". I also got a magazine extension kit to go with the 20" improved cylinder barrel."

“Ruger had the Mini-14 and I got one of those to have something in 5.56×45mm. I got some good aftermarket 30 round magazines to go with that. For Christmas one year, I bought myself a Browning Hi-Power and 4 extra magazines. I then started saving up for a civilian version of the M14. The military had that M21 rifle and that’s what I set my sights on. Trust me they’re expensive, especially with a good scope.

“Anyway, Springfield Armory had four models available when I bought mine, the Standard, National Match, Super Match and the M1A-A1 Bush Assault. I got the top of the line at the time, the Super Match. I also picked up a box of 25 of the 20 round USGI magazines, new in the box. I had to save up to get a good scope and the next year, I picked a Leupold variable power scope.

“I kept saving for my next gun but couldn’t find anything I wanted. I eventually got interested in Single Action Shooting and bought 3 Colt Single Action Army revolvers, one in each barrel length. Next, I got a Marlin 1894 Cowboy in .45 Colt. I followed that with a Marlin 1895 Cowboy in .45-70. I got scabbards for the rifles and quality leather for the revolvers from Kirkpatrick in Laredo, Texas and Alfonso's of Hollywood. That was about the time I also started buying American Eagle gold and silver coins.

“Next, I got a 12 gauge, side hammer coach gun. I laid off firearms acquisitions for a while although I kept setting aside some money for another purchase. When Winchester announced they were stopping production, I quickly acquired a pair of 9422s, one in .22LR and the other in .22WRM and a model Original Legacy 94 with a 24” barrel in .45 Colt plus a Trail’s End 20” blued, also in .45 Colt.”

“Had a full gun case, huh?”

“Yeah, I suppose so. I continued to save and half went to buy silver and gold Eagles and junk silver. All of the extra money I got from reenlistment bonuses and combat pay went into precious metals. I was fairly well equipped with firearms by then. I had a bunch of money set aside for additional firearms purchases and just let it accumulate. What with my pay being exempt from income tax while I was in the combat zones those three times, I managed to accumulate a big chunk of money.

“I heard about the McMillan Family stocks and weapons and contacted them to see if I could get my Super Match converted to a synthetic stock with an adjustable cheek piece and the action bedded with a free floating barrel. Long story short, I dropped the rifle off and while I was there, saw the Tac-50. They had a package deal with Nightforce NXS 12.5-42×50mm Tactical Illuminated Reticle Riflescope-Mil-Dot using A.R.M.S. throw lever rings. When they called to say my rifle was ready, I not only picked it up, I also added the night vision rail and acquired an AN/PVS-27 MUNS which would mount on the night vision rail. The Nightforce scope upgrade was a nominal charge.

“The biggest problem was the thing with the ’86 FOPA. I managed to get around that through a fellow Noncom and got suppressors for the Mini-14, Super Match, model 70 and the Tac-50. I had several cases of Lake City ammo for all of my military style weap-

ons and some commercial stuff for the non-military calibers. They were late model suppressors with high rated lifetimes. And, they were also expensive. A kid that worked in my repair shop really got hard up and sold me a Ruger Mark II and a Mossberg 590A1. From that point on, most of my money either went into precious metals or ammo. Then, this thing with the diabetes came up 4 months before I had 20 in.

“I was able to get some .50 caliber ammo from my buddy, provided I paid him in gold. I thought about it and made the deal, ending up with 20 cans each of match ball and another 20 cans of an anti-material round. On top of that, he was responsible for logging in certain ordnance that was classified rounds of ammo and about half of what he was supposed to record as turned in was noted as being expended.”

“What kind of things are those?”

“Rockets, grenades and some actual ammo. I bought all I could get. My gold and silver is worth a whole lot more than I have in it. Plus, I get my retirement pay. I had the Mark II modified by a guy in the armory using my pistol and some things he picked up. I guess that’s about it.”

“How in the name of God did you get that stuff off post?”

“Slowly, very slowly, one or two pieces at a time or a box of the M118LR at a time.”

“So, you’re fully stocked?”

“Not quite yet, but what I need I can buy on the open market, mainly a bunch of Speer Gold Dot and Hornady A-MAX. Anyway is there anything that I should be aware of?”

“About the only thing that comes to mind is that we need to rebuild the storm cellar. It up and caved in.”

“Darn, I was going to store my preps in there. Well, maybe that’s a blessing in disguise. What do we keep on hand for fuels, oils and lubricants?”

“We have two 500 gallon farm tanks; one of gas and the other of diesel. I’ve been buying motor oil by the drum and the oil and other filters by the case. I have a few tubes of grease for the grease gun. That’s about it.”

“What happens when the power goes out?”

“I milk by hand and Sally runs into town to pick up some dry ice. We have our own 5kw gas powered portable generator for the refrigerator and freezer.”

“Same old wood/coal furnace?”

“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it; yeah same as before.”

“I’m going to run into town and restock the pantry. We have anything we can butcher?”

“Got a steer we were going to sell and 4 hogs. Your folk’s old chest type gave up the ghost, so you’ll need a new freezer. Better check that refrigerator too. Take the farm truck; that’s it over there, the ¾ ton GMC with the topper.”

“Have time to run the livestock into the locker plant?”

“I’ll make time Mark. Figure 10 -14 days before it’s ready for pickup.”

The pantry was almost bare and what was there wasn’t fit to use. I made a run to Sam’s Club and bought the membership. I bought enough shelf stable food to mostly fill the pickup. I skipped meat and dairy until I could get Sears to deliver a new refrigerator and freezer. I’ve always drunk my coffee black and don’t much care for cereal.

I took my time and rearranged the large pantry while I unloaded the pickup. Jack had cleaned out some of the folks’ stuff so I chose the master bedroom and made up the bed. Finally, I needed a break and started the electric percolator brewing a pot of French Market coffee. While I waited, I brought my gun collection in from the Suburban and stored it in my old bedroom.

After my break, I moved in the remainder of my possessions plus the ammo and ordnance I’d accumulated over the years. Using Mac and Sally’s phone, I called and made an appointment to see old Doc Miller and get set up to continue treating my diabetes. I still took a drug that did something to keep my blood sugar level in the normal range and needed a new prescription. I also called Sears and placed the order for the refrigerator and freezer. I also ordered a replacement propane fueled kitchen stove.

Mid-afternoon, I looked over the old storm cellar and decided I’d see if my old pal Kirby could build a new one. I cleaned up, put on clean jeans and one of the newer western cut shirts I had. I started wearing western style clothing back when I was into SAS and had continued since then.

I’d had my amateur extra class ticket for 4 years and had a NIB Kenwood TS-2000, my old Hallicrafters receiver plus the money set aside for a tower and both vertical and beam antennas. Time permitting, I’d talk to the local radio guy and see about him installing the tower, rotor and antennas.

The farm corporation retained all of the earnings and Mac showed me the checking account and the stack of CDs that held the accumulated funds. He was right, they’d done well and there was more than enough money available to do anything within reason for the farm or myself.

The Vet – Chapter 1

I grabbed a light jacket, my Stetson, got in the Suburban and headed back to town. I wanted the old refrigerator and freezer repaired for future use and planned to have the stove checked out at the same time.

“Kirby in?”

“Hang on...Kirby, there's a guy here asking for you.”

“Mark? Mark Bacon? Hell, I thought you were a lifer.”

“Might have been but I developed diabetes and had to retire.”

“Come in...take a load off. Coffee?”

“Sure Kirby, coffee would be great. Still drink the French Market?”

“At home, yeah. But it's an acquired taste and the office gets Folgers from the coffee service. Black?”

“Please.”

“Here you go. You're looking fit. When did you get out?”

“About 6 months back. Couldn't find a job so I moved back to the farm. Anyway, besides looking up my best buddy, I need to talk business for a minute.”

“What do you need?”

“That old storm cellar finally caved in. I'd like to put in a replacement and since you do masonry, I figured I'd hire you.”

“Let me grab a pad and tell me what you have in mind.”

“I was thinking a combination storm cellar/survival shelter. I'd put it about 15' from the house, buried ten feet deep and connected to the basement wall with a tunnel.”

“A bomb shelter? You know something I don't?”

“Nothing specific, no. Anyway, I'd like it 30' wide by 40' long with 9' walls and an 8" poured concrete overhead. You'd have to figure out the roof supports and so forth. We'd put in a ramp up to the basement wall. Any way to make this turnkey? I'll drive down to Cummins in Springfield for the generator which I'd like in a separate room off the shelter. I want a ¾ bath and plumbing for a kitchen in it.”

“Turnkey? Well, if I get together with a couple of other people we could do it that way if you wish. Need a plumber and an electrician. But, you’re talking about a floor about 22’ deep, how are you going to handle the effluent?”

“Storage tank and sewage pump.”

“You were thinking block I take it?”

“That was my initial thought, yes.”

“I can save you a bunch if we form and pour it. Probably be a lot stronger too. I built one a couple of years back when old man Simpson sold his farm and built a new home here in town. He has a sub-basement they use for their shelter. There’re probably ten or twelve families here that have put in shelters recently because of Whiteman.”

“They pulled the missiles!”

“Yeah they did. I think the fear is that some countries might not believe that if we really ever had *The Day After*. The movie was a real bonus for those in the construction business for a while. Welcome to the club.”

“What, you too?”

“Yeah, I’m in the business and I built one for the family and use it as a showpiece of sorts. I went all out when I built mine and I didn’t bury deep like you’re planning. It’s detached from our home and the overhead is at ground level. We used the excavated dirt to mound over 6’ of soil.”

“Where do you live now Kirby?”

“Joanne and I have an acreage east of town on the highway. Our oldest is in college in Columbia. You married?”

“Never found the right woman.”

“You’re what, 37?”

“Thirty-eight.”

“You remember Joe Hansen?”

“Yeah, why?”

“Remember his younger sister Evelyn; the one that everyone called Eve?”

“Vaguely, why?”

“She got married after she finished college but her husband was killed in a head on collision out on his sales route. She never remarried.”

“Running a sideline as a matchmaker?”

“Nah, just popped in my head.”

“Is Knudsen still the radio guy here in town?”

“He died. There’s a new guy in town. Need something?”

“I have my amateur extra class and thought about a tower and antennas out at the farm.”

“Name’s, Kincaid. He put in our tower for our business radios.”

“I’ll look him up.”

“Good, you’ll kill two birds with one stone.”

“Why?”

“Eve works for him.”

“Reminds me of a song. *Matchmaker, matchmaker, make me a match*. That’s from *Fiddler on the Roof*.”

“Not me. I was just mentioning it. Let me get a set of plans put together and I’ll call you. What’s your number?”

“Haven’t had the phone turned on. You can call Mac or I’ll call you and give you my new number.”

“After Jack and you left the farm, your dad hired Mac, didn’t he?”

“Yes, a year after I left to go in the service.”

“Where were you last stationed?”

“Nowhere.”

“Huh?”

“The place doesn’t exist, officially. Call it Nellis Air Force Base if you need a name.”

“Vegas?”

“Sort of. Well, I’d better get going. I’ll call you and let you know my new number. When could you start?”

“About 3 weeks, if we can get it all set up.”

“I’ll order the other things from American Safe Rooms.”

“Blast door and air purifier? Let me get them, it will save you a few bucks.”

“Sure. I have to be running, see you later Kirby.”

“Don’t be a stranger Mark.”

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I stopped by the bank and added my signature to the signature cards for the farm’s bank accounts. I was listed on the cards as the corporation president and knew the banker so it was mostly a formality. Next, I ran by the radio shop to see Kincaid. I ended up buying more than I planned on. The first thing was the US Tower HDX series 72’ tower with remote control and standoff masts for CB, business band and a Discone receiver antenna. I got 4 business band mobiles and 8 portables. I also got 4 Cobra 148GTL SSB radios, 3 Wilson mobile antennas plus a power supply for the base station. I wrote the first of many checks on the farm account.

I was also reintroduced to Evelyn Johnson née Hansen. She wasn’t the shy pig-tailed girl from high school days. We visited for a bit and I headed off to get something for supper. Pizza Hut caught my eye and I decided to stop there to eat after I ran a few more errands. It was busy when I finally pulled in and I got the last table. I was waiting for the waitress to take my order when I notice Evelyn come in and start to look around for a table. She saw me and waved as she scanned the room looking for an empty table. Not seeing one, she came to my table.

“I’m sorry Mark, but they seem to be full up. Would you mind sharing your table?”

“Please have a seat. I haven’t even put in my order yet. What do you recommend?”

“I like that 3 meat pizza. Want to get a medium or large and split it?”

“That sounds good. I’m going to order a diet Pepsi to drink. I have diabetes so I’m afraid I can’t get what I’d really like, a beer or a regular Pepsi. I don’t even like Pepsi, but they don’t have Coke.”

“I didn’t know you were diabetic.”

“Type two. I was first diagnosed about ten months ago. It’s no big deal, I take a pill and watch my diet.”

“That was a large purchase you made today. What class license do you have?”

“Amateur Extra Class. You folks will submit that application for the business radio license?”

“Went out in the mail. When we get it back, we’ll program the frequencies. If you have a computer, we can sell you the software and a connector so you can apply for more frequencies and add them when you receive the additional frequencies from the FCC.”

“Kirby mentioned that you got married after you graduated from college but your husband was killed in an accident. I’m sorry.”

“We’d only been married a few months Mark. He got a really good job as a manufacturer’s rep and got into that accident near Kansas City. I’m afraid I took it rather hard and sort of withdrew into myself for over five years. I’m not much of a party girl and never met anyone in church that I was interested in. I had planned to teach and we wanted a large family. Somehow, his death made it too hard for me to be around children so I worked first for Knudsen and then Kinkaid. Kinkaid took over Knudsen’s business so I didn’t change jobs, just employers.”

“That was convenient.”

“Yes it was. I...”

“Take your orders please?”

“We’ll have the medium 3 meat pizza. I have a diet Pepsi and she’ll have...”

“I’ll have the same.”

“Anything else?”

“Evelyn?”

“That should do it.”

“Twenty minutes, give or take. I’ll bring your drinks.”

“As I started to say, I’ve worked for the same firm for 11 years. You were in the Army?”

“Air Force. I was a jet engine mechanic and eventually a rebuild shop supervisor.”

“I suppose you moved around a lot?”

“Some, yes. I was in Desert Storm and did two tours in Iraq this go around. Then, I was transferred to Nellis and retired from there.”

“Where is Nellis?”

“Las Vegas. I actually worked at a different facility.”

“Which one?”

“I really shouldn’t say. Ever heard of Groom Lake?”

“Oh, yes I have. I understand why you can’t say. No UFOs?”

“Not that I ever saw. Just various test aircraft. I’m afraid I can’t say more.”

We visited until our pizza was delivered. Since pizza tends to be heavy on the fats, I didn’t eat much. When we finished, there were still 2 slices.

“Why don’t you take the rest home Evelyn? I really have to watch my fat intake because it raises my blood sugar level.”

“Okay but I should pay for the pizza.”

“Dutch treat?”

“If you insist.”

“I do or I can pay the full amount.”

“No, Dutch treat will be better.”

We added 15% of the total the bill and split it 50-50. She left in her Subaru and I climbed into the Suburban. Kincaid had said that when everything came in, he’d bring it out to the farm and install it. It would be a month or more before he could install the tower because the concrete base would have to cure first. He’d be out in two days to install the base.

I’d opted for the MFJ 10 band vertical to be placed above the Cushcraft beams and went with the recommended business band antenna and he talked me into a Diamond D-130-J for my receiver. One of my errands had been to get the phone turned on and the other was to arrange for satellite TV and Internet. The dish would be installed the next day. I wanted to get a Starduster or clone for the CB.

When my Internet was up, I went searching and found the Starduster at Palco Electronics, Inc. in Southgate, Michigan. I called and placed an order. The tower base had been

installed and I called Kirby to give him my new phone number. He asked me to come in and look at the shelter plans.

“What do you think?”

“How big is the black water tank?”

“Two fifty. I’ll also install a grey water tank and you can use it for the sinks and shower. I figured you’d probably want a new well, right?”

“I hadn’t thought about that. Nothing wrong with the well we have. I’ll check with Mac. Any problem putting in a 500 gallon black water tank and 1,000 gallon grey water tank? How much and how soon?”

“I went ahead and ordered the stuff from American Safe Rooms and it came in. If you approve the plans, we can start in two weeks. No problem on the larger tanks, they just cost more. Did you get the antenna tower you wanted?”

The concrete base is in and curing. The stuff from Sears should be here tomorrow. I’ll need a propane line for the stove. I’m going to Springfield tomorrow. Met Evelyn and we ended up eating dinner together.”

“A rolling stone...”

“It wasn’t like that Kirby. I stopped at Pizza Hut for supper and took the last table. She came in a few minutes later and was looking around for a table. She asked if she could share my table and I said yes. We visited a bit while we waited and went Dutch treat on the meal.”

“Who got the leftovers?”

“She did, I have to watch my fat intake.”

“Yeah, right. I need the price of the equipment plus three grand down, six grand when it’s in and the other grand within 30 days.”

“How about a check for the full amount?”

“Nope, we’ll do it the usual way. Here’s the equipment invoice.”

I wrote that check, which included the 30% down, and told him I’d see him in two weeks when they’d begin excavation. He said the excavation was another contractor and the guy would be there the following week to start removing the soil. After that, the plumber would be out and put in the tanks, water and gas lines. The electrician would use a trencher and lay the conduit for the electrical and the antenna cables if I wanted. I’d have to pay separately for the antenna cable trench and conduit.

“Ok but I’m putting the ham radio in the shelter with a business band and CB. There will also be a business band and CB in the house.”

“How many radios did you buy?”

“Well, I bought the tower, 3 standoffs, a MFJ vertical, a Cushcraft beam, the business band antenna and ordered a Starduster from a place in Michigan. The radios included 4 business band mobiles, 8 portables and 4 CBs.”

“No CB portables? Why didn’t you get a Galaxy DX2547 AM/SSB CB Base Radio?”

“Which portables?”

“Cobra. Get the base station I mentioned. You haven’t taken delivery of the mobiles have you?”

“Not yet.”

“Apply the price of the power supply against the price of the Galaxy, you’ll be much happier.”

“Mark? Your radios aren’t in yet.”

“I’d like to make some changes. Kirby recommended that I not get the power supply for one of the mobile CBs and get a Galaxy DX2547 in addition to the mobiles. I’ll also need one more Wilson mobile antenna plus 8 Cobra portables.”

“We recommend the Cobra HH Roadtrip 40 channel portable. Do you want the Cobra Microtalk MA-EBM Earbud Microphones?”

“Do I need them?”

“They allow for quiet communications.”

“Sure, one for each portable.”

She gave me the total after deducting the cost of the power supply and I wrote another check. I wanted to take off for Springfield but decided that I should check other Cummins locations before I made the trip. It turned out that there were two closer locations, Columbia and Kansas City and Columbia was the closest. I stopped by the farm on the way and switched to the GMC after Mac and I pulled the topper. And then, off I went. The model I bought was the Cummins DGCB, which was a bit more power than the shelter would need but would provide full power for the farm at 55kw prime.

The Vet – Chapter 2

I also bought enough fuel, air and oil filters for two years continuous run time and planned to get a drum or two of oil in Sedalia.

Although the generator would produce 55kw, it had a built in 10% overload capacity which reflected the standby power rating of 60kw, I made certain that the alternator was an extended stack (full single phase output) alternator so the generator could supply single phase output up to full set rated 3-phase kW at 1.0 power factor. Filter change intervals were recommended at 500 hours fuel and 250 hours oil. You shouldn't change the filter without changing the oil so that meant I'd need 11.5 quarts of oil 35 times per year under full use.

I had 96 oil filters, 48 gas filters and 36 air filters. I calculated that I'd need 70 times 11.5 quarts of oil or 4 drums of 15w-40. I couldn't get a rebuild kit and had to order it. I figured what the hell and ordered 3 for the engine and 3 for the alternator. We used the loader on the tractor to unload the generator out of the way and replaced the topper.

The filters and such went down in the basement. The next day, I placed the order for the 4 drums of motor oil. Looking at the generator, I tried to figure out if I should put the muffler before the exhaust pipe or put the exhaust pipe up to near the surface and install the muffler there. Decisions, decisions...

The generator was more than a little expensive and probably larger than the farm needed. It burned a fair amount of diesel at full load and I knew I'd need a large tank. I contacted Containment Solutions and asked the price for their tanks running from a 20,000 gallon up to the largest, a 40,000 gallon tank. They definitely weren't cheap and I didn't want to spend that much considering the way I was burning through the retained earnings.

So...I began surfing the web looking for refurbished used tanks. I stumbled onto a pair of tanks, a 15,000 and a 20,000 gallon. Based on the price of a new 40,000 gallon double wall fiberglass tank, I could save at least half the price of the newer tank, or more. The man that had them up for sale didn't live but 30 miles or so away. The ad stated a price and included the expression, 'OBO'. I went to check them out and learned that they were both above ground tanks made of fiberglass and neither leaked. They were far from new and his only reason for selling them was the fact that he had buried one of those 40,000 gallon Containment Solutions tanks.

The tanks were now empty having the fuel transferred to the new tank and re-stabilized. He had them tied together with a manifold that was connected to an electric pump which fed an old gas station hose and nozzle. I explained that I had inherited a portion of my parents' farm and I recently retired from the Air Force.

"How much?"

"I was asking \$15,000."

"Well, I'm sorry I took your time, that's a bit more than I was planning to spend."

"What are you offering?"

"I could go \$8,750 and pay for the move."

"\$12,500."

"\$10,000."

"Gee, I don't know. The damn things are in the way, how soon could you get them moved?"

"Within a week; will that be ok with you?"

"Cash?"

"Cash or a check drawn on the farm account."

"Ok, \$10,000 cash and you move them within a week."

"Done. How about I give you a check and you hold it until I can get the cash out of the bank?"

"Nah, I'll hold them for a week, maximum, on a handshake."

"I'll check with a buddy of mine and arrange for dismantling and transportation. It will be cash on the barrelhead."

"Kirby, Mark."

"What do you need to change?"

"Nothing. I bought 2 used diesel tanks and hoped you might be able to move them, have the excavator dig a separate hole and run a fuel line to the generator."

"See, that's a change. Give me the details and I'll see to getting the tanks moved."

"I'll tell you what, I'll get the cash from the bank and you can call me when your guys are about ready to leave. They can follow me to the seller's farm and disconnect everything while I pay the guy off. One is a fifteen and the other a twenty. You may need a truck mounted light to medium crane to load and unload them."

“How about you and I do it ourselves this coming Saturday? You can drive the crane and I’ll drive the semi. What do you figure, 2 trips?”

“Yep. But after the excavator digs the hole, I’ll need the crane a second time to lower them.”

“How big are the holes?”

“Both tanks are 10’ in diameter. One is about 30’ long and the other closer to 40’.”

“Which brand?”

“Containment Solutions.”

“I’ll check my catalog and call the excavation contractor to see if they can have the tank locations excavated by Friday night. I’ll also order the rock so we can fill the lower half of the tank location with rock. It’s probably cheaper to dig one hole 40’ long by 25’ wide.”

“I love it when a plan comes together.”

“Sounds like Eastwood.”

“Hannibal Smith, *The A Team*.”

“I remember that. Didn’t last long, 3 or 4 years.”

“It came out the year I entered the Air Force, 1987.”

“Seen Evelyn?”

“Just when I went to change the radio order.”

“You haven’t asked her out?”

“No, matchmaker, I haven’t.”

“You’re missing a good bet. She’s attractive, wouldn’t you say?”

“Yes, very. I’m not looking for a wife or companion Kirby.”

“A man needs a family. Oh well.”

“See you Saturday at the shop.”

“Ok.”

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I hadn't planned on burying the tanks too deep, maybe 6' of earth cover. The excavator dug the holes 18' deep meaning I'd have an 8' earth cover. I also realized that we needed to change the plans to incorporate an attached, separate room to hold the generator. Apparently, Kirby realized the same as I did and he modified the plans, allowing for another 15' tunnel to a 10'x10' room with a 6' ceiling and an additional means of egress, a vertical shaft. He showed me all of the changes Saturday morning when I showed up to pick up the crane.

It took all day Saturday to dismantle, load, move, set and re-plumb the tanks. Apparently, they'd been cleaned after they'd been emptied. Around 4:00, as we were finishing up, he said that Joanne and he intended that I come over for steaks around 6:00. We took the vehicles back and I returned home to get cleaned up. I must have forgotten how conniving Kirby could be when he had his mind set on something.

"Hi Joanne, long time."

"Well, look at you Mark. You look almost the same as you did when you went off to the service. Oh wait, she's just pulling in."

I turned and looked and Evelyn was just getting out of her Subaru.

"Did you guys set me up?"

"Evelyn? No, we just invited her to the cookout too. She comes out occasionally for dinner. Has Kirby been playing matchmaker again?"

"Hi Joanne, Mark."

"Hi Evelyn. I didn't know you would be here or I'd have dressed up a little better."

"You look sharp Mark, cowboy or Single Action Shooter?"

"Single Action. Well, maybe I didn't under-dress, are you a Single Action fan too?" My question referred to the fact that she was also wearing cowboy boots, jeans, western cut blouse and wearing a black Stetson.

"Fan, yes. I even participate a little. Just one of many hobbies."

"Come in so we can keep the flies out, you two."

"Is Kirby off on another of his matchmaking schemes?"

"I really don't know, Evelyn. He has been pestering me to ask you out for a date."

“It seems like every time a new face shows up in Sedalia, he turns the screws on both the guy and me. All well-intentioned, I’m sure. I’m not totally opposed, but I’m not in a hurry. Oh, I never asked, are you married, divorced, a widower or single?”

“I’ve never married Evelyn.”

“You can call me Eve if you’d rather, Mark.”

“Whichever you’d prefer.”

“Eve. I understand that Kirby and you spent the day moving some fuel tanks.”

“Yes. I bought two used diesel tanks for the farm and he helped move them and install them. Are you a longtime friend of Kirby and Joanne?”

“Joanne is my cousin. Kirby and she have been real dears since Scotty was killed.”

“I didn’t mean to bring up unpleasant memories.”

“I quit wearing black several years ago. I kept my married name out of respect for Scotty’s memory.”

The evening was pleasant. Dinner consisted of Rib-eyes, baked potatoes, Caesar salad and mint chocolate pie for desert. We visited until near ten when the long day and work finally caught up to me.

“I’m going to have to call it a night, guys. It’s been a long day.”

“I should be going too. See you in church tomorrow Mark?”

“Which service?”

“Ten-thirty.”

“Ok, Eve, I get around early and see you there.”

I’d been an irregular church attendee during my time in the service. Kirby, Joanne, Eve and I all went to the same church in Sedalia, the Taylor Chapel Methodist Church. After the service, I suggested that we have Sunday dinner, on me.

“Sorry Mark, we have a roast on. Why don’t you take Eve out for Sunday dinner?”

“Eve?”

“Uh, sure.”

“Where would you like to go?”

“Golden Corral or Perkins would be fine.”

“I’ve never eaten in a Golden Corral.”

“It’s one of the best in Sedalia.”

“Golden Corral it is. Want to leave your car here and ride in one vehicle?”

“My apartment is on the way; we’ll just drop it off.”

I followed Eve home...her apartment was just two blocks off the main drag. She pulled into the open garage under her apartment, locked her Subaru and joined me in the Suburban. I followed her directions to Golden Corral and we parked. As I got out and moved around back to open her door, she got out on her own. I punched the remote to lock the door and followed her to the entrance. We had to wait for only a few minutes before we were seated.

They had a hot bar, cold bar, soup and potato bar and a bakery bar. It wasn’t half bad although I realized that it sure wasn’t Perkins. Perkins had actual menus and a person could get whatever they were in the mood for and not need to select what was available on the buffet. Having spent 20 years eating military food most of the time, I found more than enough choices to fill my stomach.

“Joanne said you were having Kirby do some other work for you.”

“The old storm shelter caved in and I asked him to build a combination storm/bomb shelter.”

“You too?”

“What?”

“Joanne and Kirby have one and I have a reserved spot. The only thing that worries me is whether or not I’d have time to get to their place from wherever I happen to be if we have a tornado or, God forbid, a missile attack.”

“If you’re in town, you should have about 20-25 minutes. We use satellites to monitor possible launches and follow the policy of launch on warning. In English, as soon as we determine the launch and trajectory, we fire our Minuteman missiles.”

“What about the missiles in the submarines?”

“Ours?”

“Un-huh.”

“They’re primarily a reserve force. It’s pretty much the same with our bombers. If the government suspects that someone is preparing to go to war with us, the bombers can be pre-loaded. You know we used to have a large fleet of B-52s. They mothballed and destroyed 365 G models because of START. The B-1 bomber was shelved by Carter and reborn under Reagan. That’s when they went from the B-1A to the B-1B. The cancellation came about 10 years before I entered the Air Force. The final of the 100 B-1Bs was delivered in 1988. I worked on the engines for a while.”

“Have you seen a lot of the country?”

“Sure, I was in Texas more than once, Whiteman for a while, Nevada until I retired plus my times overseas. I got lucky and didn’t transfer a lot.”

“And now, you’re farming?”

“It’s not large, only a quarter section. I making a few improvements and will be helping Mac with the planting and harvesting. Since we raise canola, I could always get a bio-diesel processor and produce biodiesel. We could produce about 125 gallons per acre and have 40 acres so we could produce about 5,000 gallons of biodiesel.”

“What else do you raise?”

“We grow alfalfa and corn... 40 acres of each. The last 40 acres is permanent pasture and the homestead.”

“Do you have livestock?”

“Milk cows, hogs and chickens plus a bull and a boar.”

“No horses?”

“Dad sold them after I went into the Air Force. I haven’t ridden in over 20 years. Do you ride?”

“I go to the riding stable and do the trail rides. I don’t have a horse and considering my income, I couldn’t afford to keep one.”

“You said something about Single Action Shooting...tell me about that.”

“I actually got started in it because of Scotty. He had the revolver, coach gun and rifle. The revolver is a Cimarron 5½” model P. The coach gun is a Cimarron 1878. The rifle is Winchester, a Legacy 94 in .45 Colt. I don’t have any other firearms except the ones Scotty had.”

The Vet – Chapter 3

“Where was Scotty from?”

“Columbia. I met him during our freshman year. He lived with an aunt and uncle. His dad took off for parts unknown and his mom later died from cancer. He was seven when his dad disappeared and twelve when his mom died. The aunt and uncle were his mother’s sister and her husband. He had some insurance money due to his mom’s death and got a 4 year scholarship.”

It had obviously been a while and she’d shed all the tears over Scotty that she intended to. Like she said, she mourned him for 5 years. We finished up eating and she asked if I was interested in seeing a movie. There was one playing at the State Fair Cinemas she said she wanted to see. I really didn’t have any plans so I said I’d be happy to go with her. Since I bought Sunday Dinner, Eve insisted that she buy the tickets. We were stuffed from lunch and managed to bypass the real money maker, the concession stand.

The movie was ‘2012’ starring John Cusack. He played a writer named Jackson Curtis. According to the IMDB, *Dr. Adrian Helmsley, part of a worldwide geophysical team investigating the effect on the earth of radiation from unprecedented solar storms, learns that the earth's core is heating up. He warns US President Thomas Wilson that the crust of the earth is becoming unstable and that without proper preparations for saving a fraction of the world's population, the entire race is doomed. Meanwhile, writer Jackson Curtis stumbles on the same information. While the world's leaders race to build "arks" to escape the impending cataclysm, Curtis struggles to find a way to save his family. Meanwhile, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes of unprecedented strength wreak havoc around the world.* Walt Disney would have liked the ending.

“Do want to stop for coffee?”

“Pick a restaurant.”

“Oh, I meant at my apartment.”

“Well, sure. That popcorn really smells good.”

“Get a bag and we can share it.”

There’s just something about movie theatre popcorn...the smell, the flavor or the texture. I noticed after we got to her apartment and she started the coffee that Eve, too, was using French Market. Somewhere, sometime, she’d acquired the taste for the chicory coffee blend too. At least it wasn’t Columbian...I hate that with a passion. Speaking of coffee, French Market is a New Orleans favorite, French roast is about all you can get in San Francisco and many Californians drink Yuban, 100% Columbian.

“Milk or sugar?”

“Black, thank you.”

“I should have remembered. How is the work on the shelter coming?”

“The excavator starts on the hole tomorrow. The side issues like blast door, air purifier, generator and fuel tanks are either in or are ready to be installed when the time comes.”

“How much further east is your farm from Joanne and Kirby’s?”

“Not far, about 4 miles.”

“Um, this popcorn is good. I don’t mean to pry, but why didn’t you ever marry if you weren’t transferred that often?”

“I don’t really know Eve. First off, I wasn’t looking. Second, I guess I never met the right lady. The Cold War pretty much ended by the time I’d reenlisted so it wasn’t from fear of a nuclear war. Heck, I even reenlisted during Desert Storm. The terrorist attacks didn’t happen until 2001 when I was on my third reenlistment. I can understand Afghanistan, but I could never really understand why Bush invaded Iraq. Nonetheless, I did two tours there, mostly at Balad. My fourth reenlistment occurred while I was in Iraq and I got orders for Nellis as soon as my tour ended.”

“Were you planning on a full thirty year career?”

“Yes I was, until I got diabetes. I managed to finish the 20 and got out. I just couldn’t find a job. The airlines were cutting back maintenance to bare minimums and didn’t need any engine mechanics or supervisors. Anyway, I had the farm and finally got smart and came home.”

“What do you think about Obama’s announcement increasing the troop strength in Afghanistan?”

“Not to step on any toes, but I think it’s stupid. People can’t seem to remember history. Russia couldn’t win their war in 9 years using more troops than we have. Don’t kid yourself, the Russians have good soldiers. They beat Hitler during WW II. Plus, their equipment is nearly equal to ours.”

“More coffee?”

“Please. Bathroom?”

“Down the hall, last door on the right.”

“Nice apartment, two bedroom?”

“Yes. At the time, it was the only one they had. I didn’t feel like moving when a one bedroom became available and I didn’t really need to because of the life insurance money I had. The earnings from my investments coupled with what I earned at the radio shop more than covered the rent and my other expenses. I actually was able to convert some of my excess funds into precious metals.”

“Really? I started a program of buying precious metals after I stopped buying firearms or in addition to would be more accurate. Every reenlistment bonus plus what I managed to save up bought gold or silver Eagles and, of course, junk silver. Much of it is worth three times what I paid for it.”

“You collect firearms?”

“I’m not a major collector at all. I just bought what I was interested in at the time and never sold any. Eventually, I had enough that I should have purchased a gun safe. At the moment, I have them stored in my old bedroom at the house. I have a fair amount of ammunition in every caliber I need plus a few things I really shouldn’t. But, the stuff became available and I bought it.”

“Full auto weapons?”

“That’s one thing that I don’t have. Suppressors aren’t legal in Missouri and I have 5. Plus I have select items that the military treats as rounds of ammunition since once they’re used they’re gone. God help me if the BAFTE ever learns about some of the things I have.”

“You’re a trusting soul.”

“Why would you say that?”

“Telling me about the illegal things you have.”

“You are Joanne’s cousin and I’d trust Joanne and Kirby with my life. I think the same would apply to you because she’s your cousin and you’re involved in shooting sports yourself. In my mind, that means you’re one of us as opposed to one of them.”

“One of them?”

“The anti-gun crowd.”

“Oh. I guess so, owning firearms is a Constitutional right. Anyone who owns a firearm is obligated to know how to use it and care for it. Although I don’t have anything beyond the Single Action category of firearms, I thought more than once about getting a concealed carry permit. I have my eye on a Ruger SP101 .357 magnum with the 2¼” barrel. My purse is already a Galco with the handgun compartment.”

“That’s good caliber. You can use both .38 Special and .357 magnum rounds. I don’t actually have a small, concealable handgun. I might just check one of those out and apply for a permit as soon as I meet the residency requirements for a CCW.”

“More coffee?”

“Thanks, but I really should be going. Another time, perhaps?”

“Anytime.”

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We got busy at the farm with the shelter, farm work and so forth and it wasn’t until six weeks later I contacted Eve about going to a movie. After that, we began to date regularly and also began to get closer to one another. When it came time to finish the interior of the shelter and lay in the supplies, she helped. I moved furniture from the house to the shelter and purchased new furniture for the house.

The supplies we accumulated were a combination of purchased LTS food and some we purchased and packed ourselves. I got food from multiple sources, buying the one year deluxe packages, two at a time. I set aside corn and we packaged that in Mylar bags in 5 gallon pails with oxygen absorbers. I also bought oats from the elevator and acquired bulk wheat and they, too were home packed. I got bulk rice from Costco in KC and added several varieties of beans including small white, large white, kidney, pinto and small pink.

Because of the tunnel space to the generator from the shelter, I had more than enough space to store whatever was accumulated. When Sally had extra garden produce, Eve helped me can it using mom’s old presto canner. That led me to check out Canning Pantry that I read about in a PAW fiction story and I spent more than a little money acquiring a larger pressure canner, jars, lids, pickle mixes, and oat roller and other small appliances.

When it came to buying a grain mill, I was unable to decide between the Diamant 525 and the Country Living Mill. Eventually, I went with the Diamant 525 from Lehman’s although it was the more expensive product. Or maybe, because it was the more expensive product. I didn’t buy a gun safe, opting to convert a locking office cabinet and bolting it to the shelter wall.

Eve and I both bought Ruger SP101s and were issued CCWs. The four of us went to the range frequently until both Eve and I were totally proficient with the revolvers. Kirby picked up a box of speed loaders on a trip to St. Louis for the two of us. Eve added two to her purse and I bought 4 Cordura double speed loader cases with Velcro closures. Although I had 4 cases, I only carried one.

Eve and I had gotten to the point where it seemed like the next step was to ask her to marry me. I was now 40 and she was 36. One issue was whether she could safely have children since she was a little past child bearing age for first time mothers. I found a nice 1½ carat diamond classified as perfect and purchased a complete set of rings in platinum.

“What do you think Kirby?”

“Nice. Going to pop the question?”

“Nah, I just collect expensive wedding rings. I don’t suppose you know a good looking woman who might say yes if I asked.”

“Well, only one but you won’t really know until you ask.”

“If she does say yes, do you have any suggestions for a wedding gift?”

“Do you have room in that barn for horses?”

“Ah, I hadn’t thought about that. Good idea, she really likes to ride doesn’t she?”

“You’ve been to the stables a few times riding with her, what do you think?”

“She wants a Morgan.”

“We know. We could contribute the tack for a pair of horses if it comes to that.”

“Saddles?”

“Saddles, bridles, halters, saddlebags and more scabbards so you could carry the rifles and the coach guns.”

“Don’t get carried away.”

“We wouldn’t, you’d still have to fill the saddlebags.”

“Ok, I think I’ll ask her Sunday after church.”

“Why don’t the two of you come out to our place for Sunday dinner? I assume you want some privacy when you ask her.”

“Remember the time when I just got back and we had that cookout? Neither of us knew the other would be there. I’d really like to surprise her.”

“Consider it done.”

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“Hi Mark, I didn’t know you were coming too.”

“Kirby mentioned it when he invited me and there was something I did want to ask you.”

“Sure, what?”

“Evelyn, will you marry me?”

I had the box containing the engagement ring open in my hand. She glanced at it briefly and looked in my eyes.

“I’d be honored. Yes. I thought I was going to die of old age before you asked.”

“If this ring needs adjusting, take it back to the store.”

“That’s a large stone and my, does it sparkle.”

“I was more interested in the quality than the size. Only a perfect diamond, for a perfect Lady. The only perfect stone he had was this one.”

“You do have a line. But, if you don’t mind, I’d rather wait until after we’re married.”

“It wasn’t a line and I agree that we should wait.”

“I thought about it, you know. In the end I decided that I wanted to wait and see what you would do. I suppose you have a wedding present picked out too.”

“Selected but not picked out or purchased as yet. Kirby and Joanne will be giving a complementary gift.”

“Try Kentucky.”

“How do you know what I was thinking about?”

“I don’t, not really. However, I suspect that Kirby gave you a few ideas.”

“As a matter of fact, he did mention a few different things. Actually, six different things, so I have a bit of a choice.”

“So who is going to tell me what to get you for a wedding present? When do we get married? I had the big fancy wedding when I married Scotty and don’t want to go through that again.”

“I’ve attended enough over the years to put me in complete agreement with you. I suggest we get the wedding license after I get the wedding present and as soon as the waiting period is up, see a judge of JP.”

“Could we have our minister perform a private wedding in front of the altar at the church with just our witnesses?”

“Of course, it didn’t occur to me. Who do we want for witnesses?”

“Joanne and Kirby, who else?”

“Ok, Eve, I have a word with minister.”

“It fits perfectly Mark, look.”

It should have fit perfectly; Joanne gave me the ring size. By delaying the wedding for only a short time, Eve would have time to talk to Joanne and Kirby and decide on a wedding present to give me. Kirby and I had discussed the Morgans further and decided on geldings. I would later learn that he suggested to Eve to get a Morgan stallion and a mare bred by a different stallion. If the mare had a Colt, we’d either have a second stallion or gelding. If she had a filly, we have two mares.

“Look!”

“Wow. Congratulations you two. Kirby told me Mark was going to propose and I gave him your ring size. Kirby didn’t say Mark was proposing today.”

“Congratulations Mark. Give me a kiss, Eve. On the cheek, if you please.”

Knowing what I had in mind, Kirby had taken out New York strips and gave Joanne some song and dance to get her to prepare Caesar salads and baked potatoes. The desert was chocolate mayonnaise cake with chocolate coffee frosting made with French Market coffee. We ate and decided to watch a movie on the Ion channel. The next day, I decided on the way to Kentucky to get two papered geldings. However, I actually ended up with two papered pregnant mares. Neither was far along enough to prevent their being ridden for a while.

Kirby had selected a stallion and a mare from a different breeder than the one I used. When I’d returned with the two mares, he’d made casual conversation and learned where I’d purchased the mares. Joanne and Kirby also went ahead and bought four complete sets of tack and a total of 7 scabbards from Kirkpatrick Leather Company in Laredo that matched my scabbard. As soon as I got back and had the horses stabled, I headed for Sedalia and Eve and I got our wedding license over her lunch hour. I had made the arrangement with the minister of our church before leaving for Kentucky and only had to call him and give him the date of the wedding.

The Vet – Chapter 4

I was new to this marriage business and didn't realize that Missouri had no waiting period. The license which cost \$58 was valid for 30 days from the date of issue. We weren't required to get blood tests or physical exams. The only delay, as it turned out, was waiting for Kirby to return with the horses and tack. He'd ordered the scabbards for overnight delivery before he'd headed for Kentucky. It happened that they had them in stock.

My holsters were unusual in that I'd had the belt made double wide with two rows of .45 cartridges and 10 rounds of .45-70. I didn't quite need suspenders if I hitched the belt tightly. Fortunately, I got the leather before I'd gained the weight that the Captain made me lose. The right holster was for the 5½" revolver and the cross draw holster for the 4¾" revolver. The belt was only wide up to the holsters and forward of that, it was standard width, 3". However, I should note that the 7½" holster was the Paladin holster with sterling knight (a paladin) were actually for 7½" revolver.

When Kirby arrived home, I called the minister and we could get married the next evening. Our minister used a somewhat abbreviated ceremony, omitting the 'if anyone objects' portion and any other portion that didn't seem applicable to him at the time. We exchanged vows, rings and signed papers. We drove back to Kirby and Joanne's to drop them off and he loaded the leather goods in the back of the Suburban.

Eve had brought down her suitcases with several changes of clothing and a few things that went in the shelter. I had one heck of a time keeping her away from the barn. We still needed to clean out her apartment; however most of her furniture was very old and was probably best disposed of to a local charity. As far as our consummating our marriage, she'd been married and I was rather inexperienced in that area. While not a virgin, my experiences could be counted without running out of fingers and toes. I had never been with a prostitute. We were no sooner in the house when Eve had me in her arms and I was running short of breath. We moved to the master bedroom and, well, you know.

We came up for air and had breakfast. She made a large omelet and we shared it. Just after we finished breakfast, Mac and Sally were at the door.

"Congratulations. It took you long enough to find one."

"Yeah, but this one is a keeper."

"Let me see your ring," Sally asked. "Oh my, that's beautiful. It almost looks perfect."

"It is perfect Sally, a perfect stone for a perfect Lady." (1.50, FL, D, HCA 0)

"We'd better go dear; it's starting to get deep."

We got dressed and both headed to the barn to give our wedding presents to the other. Neither of us had any idea that the other had purchased a pair of Morgans. We would have known if we'd looked in the back of the Suburban, but we didn't give it a thought.

"Oh my."

"The two on the left are the mares I bought you."

"The two other horses must be the stallion and mare I brought you. What did we get from Joanne and Kirby?"

"He said they were getting us complete sets of tack including rifle scabbards and others for the coach guns."

"Where are they?"

"In the back of the Suburban."

"Four saddles, all the same. There are four of everything except scabbards. There are only seven of those."

"I have a scabbard already, identical to those."

"What are the tags for?"

"I'll be darned if I know, let's read one."

"I see each set is identified for a particular horse. They seem to be a dark oil finish. They're nice, but rather plain."

"We'll have to ask, but I suspect they're quality saddles without the trim added to make them show saddles."

"Want to saddle up and go for a ride?"

"We'll have to get warmer coats."

When we arrived back at the house, Mac and Sally were at the front door holding two large shopping bags. Sally explained that Kirby had called and filled them in ahead of time and suggested particular presents and the sizes of each. There was a Walkabout Tasman Drover's coat with fleece lining and a rain slicker in each of the bags, in our sizes. There was also a pair of leather gloves in each bag. They hadn't brought them earlier, unsure we'd be awake.

"Would you like to come in for coffee?"

“No thanks Eve, you two get changed and Mac will saddle the horses. Kirby explained about the tags on each bundle of tack. Mac will also mount the scabbards and add the lariats.”

We both needed a break for a few hours to allow the soreness to ease before we pursued anymore bedrooms antics. Eve had placed her firearms in my gun cabinet when she'd brought out her clothes. While we didn't really need the firearms, we strapped on our revolvers and got the rifles and coach guns. Either scabbard would hold the rifle or shotgun. We put the firearms in the scabbards in mirror images of each other.

It's not that far around a quarter section; only 2 miles. We decided that because of the fences dividing each field, we'd be better off just riding down the road a mile or so, turn around and head back. If that wasn't enough riding, we could go the other way and turn back.

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The two diesel tanks hadn't both been filled. The smaller, 15,000 gallon tank was full and the larger, 20,000 gallon tank was empty. Later, we began ordering additional diesel fuel in 2,000 gallon loads. Eve continued to work at the radio shop and I continued to help Mac and make further preparations for the end of the world. I had taken to reading patriot fiction at various websites, including Frugal's. I downloaded TOM's spreadsheet when I saw it posted. Fleataxi was a fairly good writer, TOM about equal but Jerry D. Young was my favorite. There was also Freedom of the Hills, Grand58742 and several others who put together good to outstanding tales. I think TOM was the longest winded with 80 some stories to his (dis) credit. Plus, if I'd been reading right, Fleataxi had been in the hospital for a long time.

Speaking of those writers, TOM more than the rest seemed to have very definite ideas when it came to firearms. He liked the M1A rifle, Mossberg 590A1 shotgun and the 1911 pattern pistol. Plenty of stopping power in his MBR and handgun plus a good choice in a shotgun, almost as good as the 870. I think maybe the difference in the 870 and 590A1 was the magazine capacity. He too liked Speer Gold Dot ammo.

“How was your day?”

“Busy, we sold 37 radios and two towers. What did you do today?”

“Oversaw the delivery of another 2,000 gallons of diesel and remembered to add the PRI-D before he pumped. That brings us up to 6,000 gallons in the larger tank.”

“I went by the doctor.”

“Are you sick? You didn't say anything.”

“No, I’m not sick, I’m pregnant. I scheduled an Amniocentesis for my 16th week. I hate an invasive procedure, but it’s the best way to check for Downs. My doctor took a blood sample to pre-screen.”

“Halleluiah! So I’m finally going to be a father. Are you ok? Do you need to sit down or anything?”

“I’m fine Mark, maybe you’d better sit down; you look light headed.”

“Boy or girl?”

“I don’t know and I don’t care as long as the baby is healthy. The doctor plans to do an ultrasound but I won’t ask him to tell me the sex of our baby.”

“It doesn’t matter, I’m going to start a firearms buying program so he or she will have firearms available regardless of what Obama and the Congress do.”

“Is it ok to go out to dinner?”

“Where?”

“Pizza Hut?”

“That would be great. Did you tell Joanne?”

“Not yet. We can stop on the way back.”

“Ok. I think I’ll splurge and buy a glass of beer. I haven’t one since...gee, I can’t remember when.”

“How’s your diabetes doing?”

“The doc talked about taking me off medication. My blood pressure was 105 over 60. My blood work showed my cholesterol and triglycerides were at or below normal levels of 160. My cardiac risk ratio was below normal because my LDLs were 69 and my HDLs were 41.”

I had one glass of beer with our 3 meat pizza and Eve had a diet Pepsi. We finished the entire medium pizza this time. I mean, what the hell, my cholesterol was below normal and my triglycerides were normal. The doctor hadn’t taken me off the Avandia just yet. We stopped by Joanne and Kirby’s on the way home.

“Wait a minute, I know that look; you’re pregnant!”

“Yes I am how can you tell?”

“You’re glowing.”

“I think I wasted my money on the pregnancy test and the doctor visit.”

“You didn’t. You don’t begin to glow until you know.”

“Congratulations!”

“Thanks Kirby. Say Kirby, do you know where I might be able to buy a new 9422?”

“New? No. Good used, all over the place. Going to start building an arsenal for the baby?”

“Well...”

“Whatever you buy, buy two.”

“Nah...”

“Never say never Mark; you know better than that.”

We had a fair bit of money between us and I took Kirby’s advice and bought in twos. The first purchase was a pair of 9422s in .22LR from different Cabala’s stores. The next purchase was a pair of 20 gauge single shot shotguns. The third purchase was a pair of Ruger Mark IIIs. The fourth purchase was also from Ruger and was two of the new SR-556 auto-loading 5.56x45mm rifles and a lot of new magazines. I also took a deep breath and bought 6 100 round Beta-C magazines for the SR-556s.

The Amniocentesis showed perfectly normal amniotic fluid and the ultrasound proved that Kirby was a mystic; we were going to have twins! I must have been floating higher than a kite when I called and ordered five M1A Super Match rifles with Night Force variable power scopes. I was getting close but still wasn’t done. The next purchase was five Browning Hi-Powers with four extra magazines each. I was in the home stretch and bought five 590A1s, added 5 Taurus PT1911s with five extra magazines each and an additional SR-556.

I ordered 150 new 20-round magazines for the M1As from 44mag dot com. In addition, I ordered 18 of the 100 round Beta-C magazines, twelve for the ‘kids’ rifles and three apiece for Eve and me. Without realizing it, I was essentially duplicating my firearms collection for the expected twins, two more children and Eve. When I realized what I was doing, I back stepped and purchased three more 9422s, two more single shot 20 gauge shotguns and four more of the SR-556 rifles and additional magazines.

I had shifted from two to four when I learned of the twins and began adding my lovely wife to the process. And then, I realized that I only had five remaining \$10,000 CDs. I

didn't want to burn up anymore of the retained earnings and opted for restricting myself to the currently earned income. It amounted to about \$45,000-\$50,000 a year.

Despite my runaway buying spree of firearms and ammunition, I had somehow managed to fill the second diesel tank. I also kept an eye open for surplus military ammunition and bought a lot of 5.56 and 7.62. I reflected on our quantity of 9mm and .45acp and bought proportionally more Gold Dot. Properly stored and not moved ammunition will store for a very long time. FMJ pistol ammo was strictly military surplus. Finally, I contacted an ammunition dealer and got a volume discount on Brenneke slugs, 15-pellet 00 buck and 41-pellet #4 buck.

We bought an assortment of .22LR ammo including solid and hollow point high velocity ammo and hollow point hyper velocity ammo, by the case. I had five bricks of standard velocity ammo for the Mark II. The only thing we were actually missing was mufflers for the new rifles. Since they were illegal in Missouri, it took a bit of doing. I contacted an old Air Force buddy and told him what I wanted, Surefire suppressors for 6 Ruger SR-556s and Surefire suppressors for five M1As.

My friend was a little greedy and said he could get what I wanted provided I paid in gold at the spot price. Gold was over \$1,200 an ounce and I had maybe a quarter of that in my Eagles. I told him I felt the need for him to proceed. (Top Gun) The eleven suppressors ended up costing me 15 ounces of gold because in the interim, the price of gold topped \$1,300 an ounce and the MSRP of the suppressors remained unchanged.

The only other purchases were, in comparison, relatively cheap. I upgraded the scope on my M1A from the Leupold to the Nightforce NXS 3.5-15x50mm Tactical Illuminated Reticle Rifle Scope-Mil-Dot using A.R.M.S. throw lever rings on the other rifles and sold the Leupold to Kirby. I actually liked the Taurus PT1911 a bit more than my M1911A1 and sold the M1911A1 and purchased another PT1911, nearly breaking even in the process.

When Eve had our babies, I'm afraid I was a bit of a coward and didn't observe or participate in the deliveries. She had a baby girl followed by a baby boy. Some nameless soul (Joanne) had managed to get the doctor to reveal the sexes of the babies and we received both pink for Shelly Joanne and blue for Robert Kirby; Shelly for Eve's mother and Robert for my father.

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Meanwhile, Obama failed to get his principal program through Congress intact and like Clinton we weren't getting a new national healthcare package, yet. The war was winding down very well in Iraq and troops were being brought home. However, the contest in Afghanistan and Pakistan was altogether a different matter. As I and many others had suggested no major military could succeed in Afghanistan. Congress finally forced Obama to begin withdrawing troops because they held the purse strings.

The US and world economies were recovering, but barely. US unemployment was still around 7%. Although the Dow was just below \$11,000 and most of the government bailouts had been repaid, consumer demand was by and large significantly lower than typical. Everyone and his brother were still buying up firearms and ammunition and the prices hadn't fallen significantly.

North Korea hadn't tested any more nuclear weapons and had three more missile launches that failed to meet expectations. Iran had excused itself from international control and inspection of its nuclear program and was suspected of having completed 'several' nuclear weapons. China was once again eying Taiwan and several other oil rich countries in the region.

The only other matter high on the President's agenda was eliminating assault weapons. Unfortunately, the Democrats lost 11 seats in the Senate and the House had a bare Republican majority. Harry Reid hadn't been reelected and even Nancy Pelosi lost her seat in the House. The two California Senators were Fiorina and Feinstein. The majority of Governors were Republicans. Federal tax revenues had fallen due to the continuing bad economy and Congress had forced further cuts in federal spending in an attempt to reduce the budget deficit. In fact, nearly every state had less income than expense.

Middle Eastern countries had dropped the dollar in favor of the Euro for oil transactions. MSM began to speculate that the country might be forced to use its gold reserves to purchase more oil. A new test well near the ANWR had shown that the US had huge reserves of petroleum offshore in Alaska. Additional drilling off the California coast revealed further large pockets of recoverable oil and gas.

The climate change issue remained largely unresolved. A President can make promises and commitments, but those have to be approved by Congress and it wasn't going to happen. The series of leads concerning whether global warming was natural or manmade combined with those that believed another ice age was possible, hampered further progress on reducing greenhouse gases. All of this was made worse by a continuing drought across the US. On top of all that, volcanoes and earthquakes around the world were creating additional havoc.

When the twins were 5 months old, I heard another announcement, Eve was pregnant a second time. Because of previous actions concerning firearms we had no great need to acquire more other than replace the ammo we shot up practicing. I began to keep an eye open for more used Ruger SP101s identical to those Eve and I carried. Our preferred ammo for them was Remington 158gr SJHP and 158gr SJSP. We had to order it and bought 40 50 round boxes of each, with a nominal discount. When we could afford to buy more SP101s, we bought 4 more. From that point forward, we limited our purchases of replacement ammo.

The Vet – Chapter 5

We reviewed our quantity of pails of food and added even more, increasing our stocks for enough for 6 people for 6 years. The tunnel leading from the shelter to the generator was 6' wide. Initially, I thought that Kirby was crazy. Then, when we began storing food in the tunnel, I decided he might be crazy like a fox. The drums of oil were stored near the end of the tunnel and the rebuild kits and filters on shelves in the generator room. One tunnel wall was stacked, floor to ceiling, with LTS food and we had been forced to start on the other side.

We were visiting with Kirby and Joanne one Saturday and he brought up the subject of gas masks, adult, infant and for small children. I thought I knew better; however, I came to the realization that I'd overlooked the obvious. We got on Kirby's computer and ordered 6 Millennium gas masks, two cases of extra filters, 6 Tyvek ensembles and 6 sets of baby safe pro and 6 child safe pro. On a roll, Kirby next brought up our radiation detection equipment.

"What I don't understand is why you buy in the quantities you do. Are you planning a large family?"

"Nah, they're spares. The shelter has enough room for 12 people, minimum. Where do you recommend I get the radiation equipment?"

"There that outfit in Texas or you can get it where I got mine."

"Where was that?"

"Arrow-Tech up in North Dakota. Let's look up the website."

"Look at all the different things. I'm not sure where to begin."

"You trust me to select items for you?"

"I trust you more than my brother."

"Ok, equipment for 6 adults and 6 children, right?"

"It's a start."

"Give me your credit card and a few minutes. I'll print out the invoice when I've finished."

"Be my guest, I go check on Eve and the babies."

"What are you two up to?"

"Ordering gas masks, suits and filters at first. Now Kirby is at the Arrow-Tech website."

“Best of the best, huh?”

“What do you mean Joanne?”

“You can do one stop shopping, if you own the bank. Don’t worry, Kirby won’t put you in the poor house. Eve was saying that you bought processors to make your own baby food. It seems that you two are fairly well prepared. How big is your first aid kit?”

“It’s just a standard first aid kit. We have extra over the counter meds and band aids; you know the usual.”

“I think perhaps Eve and I had better resolve that problem. You can’t always call 911 when something major happens. We’ve already discussed the clothing issue.”

“Here you go Mark, you’re all set.”

“I guess I won’t be buying that CD with the retained earnings. Joanne was just mentioning clothing and first aid supplies. I have a feeling that I’m not going to like this.”

“Actually, I’m enjoying myself spending your money. You have a grounded cabinet to act as a Faraday cage, right?”

“Uh...”

“I have an extra at the office, I’ll bring it over.”

In the order that I brought the subjects up, I said what we got at Approved Gas Masks. Kirby bought an AMP-200, two portable 500R survey meters, a remote reading 500R survey meter, 1 50mR Geiger counter, 12 low range dosimeters and 12 high range dosimeters and the associated equipment, like the chargers and so forth.

The following Saturday, I got to baby sit while Joanne and Eve went shopping for clothing. They came back with the Suburban literally stuffed. Joanne had also gotten prescriptions from Doc Miller and placed a large order with Emergency Medical Supply. In addition she enrolled both of us in the basic EMT class, offering her services as baby sitter. We were very busy during the winter and I got a headache every time I tried to remember all that we’d been taught.

Did I mention that the doctor discovered another pair of twins or that both were male? They were born on March 23rd. We named them John Alfred and Andrew David. I bought a large economy sized box of condoms, just in case. For a brief period, we had four in diapers and we put up the cloth diapers and went to disposables.

The radiation equipment was stored in the second cabinet along with the extra radios and some of the medical supplies, like sharps, and equipment. Joanne hadn’t been

messing around when she ordered the medical supplies and equipment. In addition to various prescription drugs, we had an automatic defibrillator, and 10lpm oxygen concentrator, a nebulizer and a few other things. The drugs included IV solutions in 500ml bags and multiple flavors. The bulk was normal saline.

Doc Miller gave me 52 sample cards of Avandia, enough for a year, and took me off the drug. We had stocked up on pre-natal vitamins and both children's and adult vitamins. Both Evelyn and I updated all of our various immunizations and the children were getting their childhood vaccinations. We began a firm practice of getting flu shots each fall and made certain that our tetanus shots were current.

The three mares produced 2 fillies and 1 colt. We decided to geld the colt and breed the fillies when they were old enough. When the time came, we bred the mares again. Our riding time became limited due to our producing our family. Since Eve was a far better rider than me, she often rode the stallion. When the mares foaled again, we'd have a herd of 10 Morgans.

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The overall world situation continued to slowly disintegrate. While the US and world economies continued to improve slowly, the political situation was headed the other way. The nuclear club had grown from nine, including Israel, to twelve with the latest addition being Burma. Iran had been number ten, Syria number eleven and Myanmar (Burma) number twelve. It was further suspected that both Brazil and Argentina were developing nukes. Via NATO, Belgium, Germany, Turkey, Italy and the Netherlands possessed American built nuclear weapons under weapons sharing.

The swine flu had mutated in 2009 and 2010, but vaccines intended for the original strain of H1N1 had been partially effective preventing a true pandemic. Because of the new WHO definition of a pandemic, it had still been classified as a pandemic although it came nowhere near to 1918. Considering the increased earthquakes and volcanoes, something drastic was coming to your nearest locale.

Our medical supplies included Tamiflu and Relenza, just in case. The drugs were rotated on a schedule given us by Doc Miller. We were even able to get the latest and greatest nerve agent kits, the ATNAA (Antidote Treatment Nerve Agent Auto-Injector), and a supply of diazepam auto-injectors.

When we discussed it, we agreed that a warhead wouldn't have to be far off target to constitute a major problem. We weren't that far from Whiteman ABF, ~10 miles. In *The Day After*, the missiles shown being launched had been from Whiteman, supposedly. Regardless, there wasn't any truly safe place we could move to if we wanted to. America was really the land of the brave and the home of the free when compared to other countries.

We were approaching the 2012 elections and Sarah Palin was making a hard run against Obama. In view of his poor performance during his first term, she was well ahead in the polls although it was difficult to determine that from the MSM. We'd had our first black president and it was considered politically correct by a substantial portion of the population to add a woman to the list. Geena Davis was never around when she was needed. Maybe she wouldn't be the best choice, the show only lasted 19 episodes and Donald Sutherland was a real horse's behind. In some respects, the show was probably close to real life.

"Uh, I have something to tell you and I'm not sure you're going to like it."

"You're pregnant. Maybe this time we won't have twins."

"What are the odds?"

"The odds of twins are 0.011. The odds of two sets of twins are therefore 0.011^2 and the odds of triple twins must be 0.011^3 or about 0.000001331. (1.3 chances in a million) I hope the baby is a girl to even things out."

"Oh, oh."

"What?"

"We only have four sets of firearms for the children."

"No problem, we'll just buy another pair of everything. At least you have your large family."

"I do, but I think this is enough. I think I'll get my tubes tied."

"Are you sure?"

"I most certainly am. We'd better look into getting home schooling materials, just in case."

"You get me a list and I'll get them bought."

"I'm not sure what we need, check with the school in town."

"I'll do that and head for the gun store. This guy is going to love me."

The school provided a list of textbooks currently in use and recommended additional books like dictionaries, an encyclopedia and various reading books. The local book store was more than happy to order two complete sets of everything although I only got one encyclopedia. The man at the gun store began smiling when I walked into the door. I handed him a list of the firearms and said, "Two of each." I decided to purchase the

magazines directly and hoped I could get a volume discount. In addition, I had to buy additional ammo and I did get a volume discount on that.

During early October, 2012, an attempt was made on Sarah Palin's life. The Secret Service did it right this time and she was unharmed. Her standing in the polls rose about 6%. Unless a lot of people were lying or changed their minds, the former Governor of Alaska would be our next President. Her running mate was a California Congressman, Howard 'Buck' McKeon. McKeon was born in 1938 and fairly old for a Vice Presidential candidate. His Primary appeal was that he was moderately conservative. They were a 'matched set' politically.

Palin and McKeon carried 62.3% of the popular vote, a landslide. That edged out Lyndon Johnson who had 61.2% of the popular vote. Ronald Reagan had the highest ever electoral vote for his second term, 525. In Russia, Vladimir Putin was reelected President and in a sharp role reversal, Dmitry Medvedev became Foreign Minister.

"What do you think?"

"About what?"

"Take your pick, the economy, the state of the world, our newly elected President, geology and/or Putin."

"Kirby, it would take me hours to answer that question."

"Eve get the results of the ultrasound?"

"That's scheduled for tomorrow."

"I can just see it."

"See what?"

"Three sets of twins."

"The odds are one in a million, I did the math."

"There was a lady in England who had three consecutive sets of twins. It had something to do with her genes. You're going to need a larger house if you don't stop."

"Eve said something about a tubal."

"Good idea, between the two of you, you might end up with a football team with a back-up bench."

"I ordered textbooks and more firearms and ammunition."

“Why haven’t you purchased more of the Single Action arms? Buy some of the stuff that Eve has.”

“I hadn’t thought about that, maybe I will. Cimarron Arms, here I come.”

Needless to say, the gun dealer was even happier when I placed the order for six each 5½” revolvers, model 1892 rifles and coach guns. When I thought about leather, I decided to go with ‘The Duke’ style of belts and holsters. Kirkpatrick had the ‘Big Jake’ and I bought various belt sizes starting with what a 12 year old would wear. I also purchased 12 more scabbards, but these were plain, not tooled.

I ordered another 12 one-year deluxe supplies from Walton feed for only, oh my God! That tunnel was beginning to fill up and we also needed a second gun cabinet. The ultrasound indicated we should make a trip to Las Vegas, twin girls, born on February 14, 2013. We named them Shelia Marie and Stephanie Anne. Yeah, I know, Valentine’s Day.

With six children at home under the age of five, we were forced to hire help for Evelyn. At least she got the tubal and presumably, we weren’t having any more children. We had a coed basketball team and a referee or a substitute. My retirement pay was between \$1,500 and \$1,600 a month. Because I had my diabetes under control, the Air Force didn’t consider me as disabled. It was just a bit more than Eve had been working at the radio store. Needless to say, she wasn’t working any longer outside of the home although her hours were longer.

“I’ve started Shelly and Bobby reading the newspaper. They’re picking up more than I expected.”

“Newspaper?”

“I started with cartoons. They’re actually quite bright.”

“Life is going to be boring.”

“Whatever do you mean?”

“The only things here that are going to be pregnant are the sows, cows and mares. What do you think about increasing our milk herd by keeping the heifers and start buying more chickens?”

“Might as well increase the size of the hog herd well you’re at it.”

“Mac was talking about possible retirement.”

“I didn’t know that; when did he bring that up?”

“After last fall’s harvest. He said he was having a lot of trouble with his arthritis. Another year or so, both will be able to draw Social Security. Sally had a career before they moved out here and started as hired hands. Mac said she had enough credits to draw her own Social Security. Apparently they made some investments over the years and have a fair amount tucked away.”

“I’d sure hate to lose them. Did he say when?”

“I believe when they’re both 66, two more years. How is Gloria working out as a help-mate?”

“I’d have to say marginally ok. It depends on which task I want her to do. When it comes to cleaning, she does a good job. She’s rather disinclined to do much with the children. Thank God for disposable diapers. I intend to use those until we’re down to two in diapers and switch back to the cotton diapers.”

I chuckled.

“What’s so funny?”

“I was remembering the first time I had to change a dirty diaper. I thought I was going to gag.”

“And now?”

“I’ve learned to hold my breath longer.”

“About Mac and Sally; did he say where they were going when they retired?”

“Apparently they have a piece of land down in the Ozarks. He mentioned outside of Rolla, Doolittle. I didn’t ask if it was bare land or improved. Even if it were unimproved, about all they’d need besides a mobile home would be a septic system, a well and a storm shelter.”

“Those things are more like mobile death traps.”

“That’s why I mentioned a storm shelter. He did say that a power line and phone line run right by the property. He also mentioned that, considering the size of our family, they might buy the mobile home soon and move out of the upstairs so we can expand our living space. It’s just a matter of unlocking the door between the house and their apartment.”

The Vet – Chapter 6

“You know, that would give us the space for a live in nanny.” How much space is there?”

“Their bedroom, a second bedroom they use as their living room, a bathroom and the other bedroom they use as their kitchen. It would give us two additional bedrooms if we got a nanny and gave her their bedroom as hers.”

“I still want to keep the babies cribs in our bedroom, I hate climbing stairs in the middle of the night.”

“It does make it easier to hear them.”

To this day I don't know what there was about that conversation. I got to thinking first about the Magnificent Kirby and his ability to sense things, like pregnancies and the number of babies. Rather than watch TV, I put on an oldies radio station and they were playing a song from the '60s.

Anyway, my mind went in a dozen different directions and before I turned in, I found myself at Approved Gas Masks' website ordering an additional 8 Millennium gas masks, 3 cases of extra filters, 8 Tyvek ensembles, 14 MSA ESP II Voice Amplifiers and 14 gas mask bags. I also bought a dozen booklets of M8 (C8) Chemical Detection Paper. My action cleared my mind and I had no trouble getting to sleep.

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“Mark, we found a very good used 16'x80' mobile home. Would it be ok to set it up here?”

“Sure Mac, we'll hook you into the power, water, septic and propane. Say do you have the key to the door between your apartment and the main house?”

“Sally has it. Before you came back, she used to unlock the door so she could get in and clean. Could you tell me something?”

“If I know the answer.”

“Just how well equipped is that new shelter?”

“I think it would be better if you came down to the basement and looked. That will allow me to show you the entrance.”

“It's hidden?”

“Yes, the entrance is behind a cabinet. Come on, I'll show you.”

“Ok, open this cabinet and pull down on this small hook. Can you see it ok?”

“I’ll be damned.”

“Now, close the cabinet door and pull on the door handle.”

“Slick.”

“Watch you head, the ceiling is only 6’6. Ok this is the blast door that can be closed if needed. That intercom is in case we’re locked down and you need to get in. You need to know the password. It’s not that complicated, ‘sesame street’.”

“The kids TV show?”

“Yep.”

“My God, this is large. Where are you storing all of the food you’ve been putting up and buying?”

“That door at the other end opens into another 15’ tunnel that leads to the generator room. Kirby made the tunnels 6’ wide and we’ve lined both sides with food and ordnance.”

“You bought more guns, didn’t you?”

“More than a few. I won’t say that we’re ready for every possible contingency, but we’re close. Here, let me open the two gun cabinets.”

“You seem to have a thing for military firearms.”

“Single Action, too. Eve and I have accumulated about 5 times as many as I had before.”

“For your children?”

“They have everything we do, with a couple of exceptions. Eve and I have .45-70s. I bought the kids 1892s in .45 Colt. I don’t know what you have for firearms but I have that model 70 in 7.62x51mm if you need it.”

“Sally has a 20 gauge pump. I have a 12 gauge pump and my old model 94.”

“.30-30?”

“Yes.”

“Have much ammo?”

“A box of 150gr and a box of 170gr.”

“Handgun?”

“No, just the three guns I mentioned.”

“I have 12 complete sets of ALICE gear plus tubes and caps to connect a canteen to the gas masks.”

“Gas masks?”

“If something ever happens, they could use chemical, biological, nuclear or radiation as in a dirty bomb.”

“They?”

“The enemy.”

“I see.”

“What?”

“You’re one of them...a survivalist!”

“It’s not a dirty word Mac. It got so bad for a while that people of that mindset stopped calling themselves survivalists and began calling themselves preppers. I am what I am, a veteran of 20 years’ service in the Air Force. I’ve seen enough in those 20 years to make me appreciate preparing for the worst and hoping for the best. Our preparations always had Sally and you in mind. We have, or have on order, equipment for both of you. While I didn’t buy you any firearms, I do have the model 70 with a nice scope. You aren’t old enough to have been issued a M1903 rifle, but a model 70 is very similar in function.”

“I’ve been hearing that crap about World War Three since I was a kid. Never happened! Never will happen!”

“Are you familiar with the expression about God’s sense of humor?”

“Nope.”

“It goes, *Be careful what you wish for because God has a sense of humor.*”

“What’s that mean?”

“Say you wished for a million dollars and God gave you the money. That’s great, as far as it goes. However, don’t to forget to pay the taxes on those million dollars. It could just be that God had a request from an IRS agent for the score of his career.”

“We’ve never even been close to a nuclear war.”

“Remember the Cuban Missile Crisis? We were closer than the public knows. It all boiled down to Khrushchev blinked. He was out of power within two years. Kennedy was dead, but I’m not sure which was worse. Less than 2 years later, in September of 1964, he ‘voluntarily’ resigned as the First Secretary. People who forget history repeat it. I suppose that I should point out that his legacy resulted in the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union.”

“Gorbachev...”

“He implemented Khrushchev’s plans.”

“I didn’t know that.”

“It’s on the internet. Look up the two men on Wiki. Be that as it may, as long as you two live here, you have a place in the shelter. All you really need is to bring is several changes of clothing.”

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“I ordered some more things from Approved Gas Masks last night.”

“Get an itch?”

“I suppose. I got to thinking about Kirby and his prognostications. Then an old song came on the radio, Skeeter Davis singing *The End of the World*. Anyway, I got to thinking about our children growing up and not having adult sizes for them. And I realized that we didn’t have any KIO₃. I had a chance to show Mac around the shelter this morning. I screwed that up, we never told him or Sally how to get into it.

“He said that Sally and he found a good used 16’x80’ mobile home and asked if they could set it up here. By the way, Sally has the key to the door.”

“Did he say when they’d be moving out?”

“No. I’d imagine as soon as the home is delivered and set up. I’ll get Kirby to help me move them. Maybe Joanne and you can give them a hand if we have a nanny by then.”

“How do you plan to go about getting a nanny?”

“Put an ad in the Sedalia Democrat. If we get any responses, you can interview them.”

We got two responses to the ad in addition to Gloria. The first was a young woman, 23, single and no children. She was also an only child. The second was Susan, an LPN, age 51. Raised a family of three. When Eve was fairly certain, she introduced me and we visited some. Eve looked at me and I winked.

“You’re hired. We will provide accommodations as soon as the upstairs apartment is empty and cleaned up. The salary you suggested is satisfactory. I do hope you know what you’re getting yourself into.”

“Well...their angels when they’re sleeping. I don’t believe I’ve ever heard of three consecutive sets of twins.”

“Susan, I calculated the odds. One point three chances in a million. We’re done having children now. The woman we hired before was to help Eve was great at house cleaning but very reluctant to help with the children.”

“The ad said you wanted a nanny.”

“Right, a nanny helps with the children. Most people can clean a house.”

“I can start tomorrow and move out here when you have a room for me.”

“Great, one down and one to go. The next task is to get Mac and Sally’s new mobile home set up and get them moved into it.”

“Good, I’m not big on housework. I’ll keep my room clean and pick up after the children. In an emergency, I can help your wife with house cleaning, but it’s not the top of my list.”

“I think we might have Gloria come in once a week to help with that. See you at 8:00am, tomorrow?”

“Ok. And, thanks.”

I learned the next day that it was Susan not Sue or Suzy. Well, pardon me all to hell. I guess it beats ‘Hey You’. An LPN no less! I checked Wiki: LPNs work in a variety of health care settings. They are often found working under the supervision of physicians in clinics and hospitals, or in Private home health care. In long term care facilities, they sometimes supervise nursing assistants and orderlies.

The US Dept. of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that there are about 700,000 persons employed as licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses in the US. LPNs must at least be high school graduates or have a GED. They follow the rules of State Boards of Nursing. Requirements for taking boards usually include a clean criminal record and graduation from an approved accredited practical nursing program.

Education and training, depending on state requirements, may be vocational-based, hospital-based, or college-based, and can vary from 9 month certificate programs to 3 years in time for certain specialties like pediatrics, surgery/anesthesia, or school nursing which usually require an associate degree in practical nursing.

She was the ideal nanny. As Eve came to know her, it turned out that her attitude concerning many things mirrored ours. To top it off, she loved to ride. Meanwhile, back at the farm, Mac and I set up a place for the mobile home and with Kirby's help installed the electrical service, propane, a phone line, a septic connection and a water connection.

A dealer delivered the home and took care of the leveling and installation of the utilities. He added the skirting after he installed heat tapes and pipe wrap insulation. It took less than a day to move Mac and Sally's things from the apartment to the mobile home. The apartment was still nearly spotless after the move and Sally showed up with her vacuum cleaner and a mop. The next day, the apartment was ready to occupy and Mac helped me move Susan's things. Of course I had to buy a bedroom suite and box springs and mattress, but the furniture company delivered them the same day. Full sized Sealy Posturepedic. I also picked up two sets of sheets and pillow cases, a blanket and a bedspread in addition to two pillows.

We had the phone company come out and install a separate phone line plus our phone line in Sally's bedroom. Eve went to town and purchased 6 twin beds and 6 chests of drawers. She also picked up 12 sets of sheets and 6 pair of pillow case, 6 blankets and 6 bedspreads. Everything was laundered before making the beds up. The other thing she bought was guard rails for the beds.

The next day Eve showed Susan how to access the shelter and showed her the contents of the cabinet holding the medical supplies. Although the cabinet was kept locked, Eve gave her a key. Standard first aid supplies were divided between the upstairs bathroom and the downstairs bathroom. I should comment that I like flexible fabric bandages when it comes to band aids. We had the children's vitamins, infant's Tylenol and children's Tylenol. The only real difference between the products was their strength and the infant's was cherry flavor and the children's was grape flavor to avoid mixing them up. Children's aspirin is ok in some cases, but can lead to Reyes Syndrome. Flu and chicken pox are two examples. Right or wrong, why take a chance? We did in fact have baby aspirin but that was limited to situations involving sprains and the like.

The control panel was set to exercise the generator for 15 minutes every Sunday morning. I followed the owner's manual and performed the recommended maintenance. I also ordered a 55 gallon drum of PRI-D and a five gallon pail of PRI-G.

Later that year, my engine seriously needed to be rebuilt and instead of rebuilding the engine, I had a boxed diesel installed. When it came time to replace the tires, I replaced all five and bought a second set of five mounted on rims and balanced. I also added a full set of belts and hoses and extra brake pads. While I wasn't particularly trying to cre-

ate some fancy bug out vehicle, I did follow some of the suggestions from some of the stories and added a front hitch and a movable 12k Warn winch. I also added a spare fuel tank. Finally, I added a hi-lift jack and a set of pioneer tools on a top rack.

Eve's Subaru was more than worn out and she asked for a Jeep Cherokee with a non-electronic diesel engine. I looked and found a used 1987 XJ with the 2.5 L VM Motori diesel I4. I had a mechanic go through the SUV from top to bottom and bought 5 additional rims and tires plus a whole set of belts, hoses and brake pads. Rather than adding a bunch of unnecessary things, I limited it to a spare fuel tank and added a full set of the radios (TS-2000, business and CB). When the tires failed the Lincoln penny test, we replaced the five tires. Since the tractor was diesel, I did get another load after the fall harvest.

Getting the new TS-2000 for the Cherokee got me to thinking and I bought three. My old TS-2000 was installed in my Suburban, the second new one went into the shelter and the third went upstairs in the kitchen.

Around the time Sally and Eve butchered and dressed the chickens, we sent a beef and four hogs to the locker plant. Jack finally showed up and asked for a hog and a side of beef. Since we had room in the freezer, we sent a second steer and hog to the locker plant. Jack was strangely distant. When I asked, he said they had used the proceeds from the land sale to purchase a new home and things had gone well until recently when he lost his job. Figuring I owed him to a limited extent, I told him the side of beef and hog were on me.

He also asked about chickens and I explained that we had butchered earlier and really couldn't spare any. I did give him 2 trays (5 dozen) eggs. He would have taken all I offered had I given him a chance. When he asked about the storm shelter, told him we'd replaced it with an improved model omitting further details. I could have easily said, 'he ain't heavy, he's my brother'. But Jack was one to get all he could, drove the latest model car and had a boat, a Winnebago and several other toys. When he dropped the hint that he and his wife should have space in our shelter, I questioned whether it was large enough.

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Keeping the horses shod was an adventure. We decided on an 8 week schedule unless a horse showed a problem, like a loose shoe. Our farrier was appreciative to work on the Morgans, but not to the extent that caused him to give us a discount. On average the horses were shod 6.5 times a year. I started to set aside money for more tack. We wouldn't try to fit a permanent saddle until they was at least four years old.

The Vet – Chapter 7

Time for spring planting rolled around about the same time it did every year. After completing the planting, everyone worked in the garden except Susan and the children. Once the garden was in, we did a complete inventory of our LTS foods and ordered replacement products to bring the stored food back to the previous levels. The only thing we bought extra of was the 50# bag of hot cocoa. Paper products, coffee, rice, Lipton tea came from Costco in KC, a nearby Sam's Club or local stores. The only ammo I bought was 2 500-round cases of .38 Special 158gr lead round nose practice ammo.

Now, at least with Susan carrying some of the load with our small children, Eve could get out for an occasional ride. If nothing else, she had 'my' stallion to ride. While life had taken on a new tempo at home, stress was beginning to build from a different source. Iran tested a nuke. The device was a single stage atomic bomb as opposed to a two or three stage hydrogen bomb.

It's been claimed that if one gave a monkey a typewriter, the primate could duplicate Shakespeare. The bomb we dropped on Hiroshima was the simplest atomic device, the cannon type weapon. The later bombing of Nagasaki used the more complex implosion device. Many of the minor nuclear powers had atomic, not hydrogen, bombs. It didn't really matter; more Japanese were killed in Hiroshima than Nagasaki due to a difference in the locations. Iran's test, by the way, was successful with a yield of 80kT.

Israel had long postured that when they felt threatened by any other Middle Eastern country they would take steps to eliminate the problem. While the world waited to see what Iran was going to do, they did as all feared and produced an atomic weapon – actually, more than one. A defector revealed that the test weapon was only the first of seven built. Remember Osiraq? Nobody was willing to risk a strike against Iran until the proof was in hand unlike the situation in 1981. While apparently standing by at full alert, Israel played the game and protested to the UN. Kirby, Joanne, Eve and I agreed that Israel was going through the motions so when they did react, the world would be on notice.

In the US, Mt. Shasta, long dormant, began spewing ash, following in the wake of Mt. St. Helens and Mt. Lassen. While totally unexpected, the event was yet another in a string of activity along the Ring of Fire. During recent years, as noted earlier, geological activity around the planet had been on the increase.

“What's it going to be, a war in the Middle East or Nature running wild?”

“My name is Mark Bacon, not Edgar Cayse, Kirby. Your guess is as good as mine. Give what we know and suspect, my money is on the Middle East.”

“Where do the principal powers stand on Iran's actions?”

“Universal condemnation; I think the only countries supporting Iran are North Korea and Argentina.”

“Where did you pick that up?”

“Fox News. It was a comment by Oliver North.”

“I noticed Homeland Security raised the Threat Level to orange. It’s been a while.”

“They ought to scrap those threat levels. We’ve never been below yellow.”

“This old world is a complicated place. Joanne and I put in an additional order with Emergency Essentials. I think we beat the rush. What’s your status?”

“We have eleven mouths to feed but I know we’re good for at least five years. Did you decide on how you wanted to stock your armory?”

“We added a pair of those Ruger SR-556s and another M1A. We already had one M1A and that pair of 870s. We also added a second PPK and a PT1911. We don’t have as much as you have, but there’s only the two of us.”

“Did you scope the M1A?”

“Tried too...it was backordered.”

“You still have the Leupold I sold you?”

“I ordered another of the same. We put red dots on the Rugers. I had a hell of a time finding ammunition. Don’t care for the imports. One of the dealers on the internet had it on stripper clips in bandoleers sealed in ammo cans. It’s that M855. Say, it just occurred to me, what frequencies do you have for your business band radios?”

“I’ll get you a list, we have a total of ten licensed.”

“You never do anything halfway, do you?”

“The beauty of it is that it leaves us with 22 unused frequencies on the mobiles and 6 on the portables. You have the software and cable?”

“You burned me a copy, remember? I did buy the cable.”

“When did I do that?”

“Between twins two and three.”

“Oh, things were hectic back then. I honestly don’t remember. How do you like the Kohler generator?”

“It’s like a Timex, takes a licking and just keeps ticking.”

“Do you feel like you as ready as you could be?”

“Who knows? What if someone nuked Whiteman and the missile was just a little off course? The possibility has earned us more money than I care to contemplate. Did I ever give you the details of how our home is constructed?”

“I never asked and you never said.”

“In addition to those heavy duty roll down shutters, the walls are filled with gravel and we used Lexan on the windows.”

“I never noticed that.”

“It’s hard to tell because the walls are so thick. The Lexan is 3” thick. The front and rear doors are actually $\frac{3}{8}$ ” armor plate inside and outside. Not quite 10mm of plate plus an additional 13mm with the shutters. Altogether there are 31.75mm of armor on the doors counting the shutters. At least it should stop small arms fire.”

“I suspect there’s more to the story.”

“The studs are 2x12s and have a layer of Kevlar inside and out. I took an idea from one of Young’s stories and included 8” of gravel plus $\frac{3}{8}$ ” plywood to hold it in place and foam panels. It was expensive but it keeps the light bill down.”

“If we ever decided to build a different home, we could incorporate some of those ideas. At the moment we’re so old fashioned we have a wood and coal burning furnace.”

“So that’s why you have that huge stack of firewood.”

“I keep it at 30 cords. Although there’s a chainsaw, I’ve just bought the seasoned firewood rather than cutting it myself. Before I came back, Mac used to cut, split and stack the firewood. Did I tell you Sally and he will be retiring in another 2 years?”

“Un-huh. Oh, that’s why they bought that mobile home. Where are they moving?”

“The Ozarks. Some town near Rolla, Doolittle. I’m guessing it’s rural, not actually in Doolittle.”

“How’s that nanny working out?”

“Best decision we ever made, excluding getting married.”

“Do you have one of those all hazards, SAME, weather radios? Hate to use another cliché, but it’s like an American Express card. What do you have?”

“Eve and I each have a portable plus the portable CBs have 10 weather channels. You know if something has to happen, I hope it waits until all 6 kids are potty trained.”

“Wish in one hand and spit in the other, Mark.”

“Don’t I know it?”

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Less than a year later, with 4 of the 6 potty trained, the long feared event came to pass. The word I got on the amateur bands was that Israel had inside information that Iran was in discussions with other Muslim countries concerning an all-out attack on Israel. Israel, through the activities of the Mossad, had been informed of the conferences and eventually the plans. Never one to turn the other cheek, Israel launched preemptive strikes against the participants using those nukes they didn’t have. Iran and Syria having known capabilities were struck first. Follow on attacks were launched against Lebanon and Saudi Arabia. Iraq was spared, initially, as were Egypt, Jordan, Yemen and the UAE. Turkey was a member of NATO and excluded. Pakistan and Afghanistan had enough problems of their own.

Eve was at home with Susan, Mac and Sally. I was halfway between Sedalia and home, returning from a last minute trip to the grocery store. I called Kirby on my cell phone and asked if he’d heard the news on the radio. He hadn’t but said he was shutting down and sending his employees home and would soon follow. I assumed that Eve had called Joanne and the diesel dealer to top off the tanks.

The trip had been necessary only because Eve was a bit low on personal products. I hit every store on the east side of town and found that while they were very busy, most of the customers were looking for food, water and so forth. Eve gave me a bit of latitude in terms of brands that were acceptable. Her first choice was pads, but tampons would work. I thought about what would happen if I got into an accident and someone noticed that the Suburban was totally packed with feminine hygiene products.

When I arrived home, I found that we were essentially somewhere between orange and yellow. Most things, excluding the contents of the refrigerator, had been moved to the shelter. The children were all down for naps so the five of us put on the TV and watched Fox News. When Shep said that the DHS had raised the warning level to red, Mac and I stripped the radios from all of the vehicles and added them to the cabinet in the shelter.

I’d always assumed that when the balloon went up, it would be a hurried affair. Such was not the case. It was more like watching one of those divers in Acapulco diving off a high cliff in ultra-slow motion. One of the Kansas City stations caught the B-2s departing

Whiteman with half headed west and the remainder headed northwest, perhaps to Alaska. Until President Palin declared a national emergency we couldn't see the point in moving to the shelter.

Eve mentioned that Mac had brought their three firearms to the shelter and they were locked up in the first gun cabinet. The livestock had been attended to and extra feed set out. I bemoaned the fact that we'd never done anything with the old barn to protect the livestock nor installed tunnels between the various buildings. She replied that the opera wasn't over until the fat lady sang. Belying her words, she was wearing the SP101 in a belt holster and had 2 speed loader carriers.

We would also learn if our garage sale entertainment would provide enough entertainment. We had a large assortment of tapes, DVDs and board games. If by chance satellite TV remained on, we'd also have TV. Not that I held much hope that either the satellite TV or internet would remain up. By late afternoon, it appeared that the major powers were taking a wait and see attitude. Eve had baked bread and put together a large batch of chili. Mac and I went ahead and milked the cows and rechecked the chickens in case they'd laid more eggs.

It was 5:15 before the diesel was delivered. He said he'd been on a dead run since the news came about the problems in the Middle East. I'd stuck the tank and it appeared that we'd get by with 1,000 gallons so I added ½ gallon of PRI-D before he started pumping. The pump cut off at 1,490 gallons. I signed the delivery receipt and poured in another quart of PRI-D. The gas tank was nearly full and I'd told Eve not to bother ordering gas. Around 6:30, the propane delivery truck showed up and I topped off the 5,500 gallon (5,000 net) tank. We only used propane for the hot water heater and the kitchen stove. Mac and Sally did the same plus the furnace in the mobile home was propane fueled.

There must be some kind of name for phenomena that happens when a major storm is brewing, be it weather related or political. People seem to go crazy buying food, water, generators and the things they should had on hand before. I even read comments at Frugal's about some of the squirrels finding themselves in the same position, especially when it came to generators. Hopefully they bought one large enough to cover the necessities and didn't sell it after the threat/storm was over. Anyone for MREs? A lot of the MREs they handed out in Katrina came from KI4U and ended up on E-Bay.

I can tell you how serious the situation was by mentioning MSNBC, the 110% liberal news organization. They were carrying nonstop coverage of the ongoing situation. Understand – this wasn't the good ol' days with Huntley and Brinkley. It was readily apparent that they didn't hold the President in high regard. I suppose that turnabout is fair play, Fox didn't care for Obama, but Sarah was America's sweetheart. On the subjects of news organizations, CNN was at its peak covering Tiananmen Square and came close in covering Baghdad during Desert Storm. Anyone remember Peter Arnett? Enough said.

Over chili and warm bread, the discussion turned to 'what happens now'. It was worse than John Foster Dulles ever imagined. Eisenhower's Secretary of State coined the term 'brinkmanship'. It didn't involve the armored car company or anything like that. What it actually referred to was nations pushing right up to the brink. Sort of that my bully is stronger than your bully attitude. The term fit the existing situation in more ways than we cared to agree about. We were actually getting along with Russia for a change.

Israel had taken a very bold step in response to a plan to reform the Persian Empire. Iran had forgotten the golden rule: Mo'lon La've. They thought an Ottoman was a foot-rest.

"Are the missiles going to fly?"

"Sweetheart I wish I knew. So far it's been limited to fighters delivering small packages that went boom in the night. If someone does react, I doubt anyone will want to be left out."

Mac perked up and retorted, "I don't care what you say Mark, I've got my fingers crossed that nobody has the nerve to be the first one. Without the first, there can't be a second."

"Right, I imagine the B-2s were on a training exercise."

"Not necessarily. Maybe it was a signal of sorts warning other countries that our nuclear triad was alive and healthy. We haven't heard anything about the B-1Bs being converted back to nuke carrying capacity. On top of that, there hasn't been one word about the BUFFs. They may be old and slow, but they can deliver a major blow. Who knows if they're loaded down with ACMs and a belly full of bombs."

"I could make a call...nah he wouldn't tell me if they were."

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Coal as a heat source was more compact than wood. Anthracite was better than Bituminous and Lignite. It only made sense to buy 30 yards of Anthracite to supplement the firewood. I'd ordered right after Kirby and I had the discussion concerning the construction of their home. Hopefully 30 yards of coal and 30 cords of firewood would get us through a nuclear winter if the TTAPS study was right.

When we woke the next morning the political situation was still up in the air and not one country was issuing press releases. I called Kirby and asked if he was still shutdown or back to work. He said they weren't taking any chances and he'd let his people have a paid day off. I asked if there was anything that could be done on short notice to protect the livestock.

“Soil is as good as anything at stopping radiation Mark. We have several sections of concrete 30” culvert. If you could move the chickens and hogs into the barn, we could put in berms to reduce any radiation and dig in the culvert to connect the generator room to the barn. You’re entire farm runs off that generator you bought doesn’t it?”

“Ok, I’ve got two mature CDs I can cash in to cover the expense. I’ll drive into Sedalia and take care of that while you do whatever it takes to make it happen. Sometimes I think it’s good that we read that PAW fiction. At least we have starting points based on some of the stories. If we write this up, we can call it Kirby’s Mission. The thing is, you don’t really sound like Percy because you don’t have a single Unimog.”

“I’m not short on Bobcats. I’ll see you later.”

“Eve, I’m going to run into Sedalia and cash those two mature CDs. Kirby is going to do what he can to protect the livestock, just in case. Would you like to ride along?”

“Would I have a little time to do some shopping?”

“We’ll make time. Do you have a list of what you want?”

“Sure do. We should take the GMC.”

“What, more beans and rice?”

“Right track, wrong train. If I can find what I want, in quantity, we can rent a U-Haul trailer.”

“Will I have enough money?”

“It’s bulky, not expensive.”

“What?”

“I looked through what you picked up yesterday and I need more. We could always use more coffee and extra spices like dried onion and chili powder. Plus a person can never have too much bath tissue.”

“How are we set on children’s clothing?”

“Joanne and I did that up right.”

“Are you taking your purse?”

“No woman leaves home without her purse. However, I’m going to wear the Ruger.”

The Vet – Chapter 8

It took 20 minutes at the bank and an hour at the first grocery store. It was like the previous day, people were fighting over canned goods and all of the bottled water was gone. We made a dent in the coffee aisle and did fairly well in the spice aisle. Then we went to Wally World for the personal items. While we were there, we added to our coffee supply and I got several pairs of leather gloves.

When we arrived back home, the ditch for the culvert extended from the generator room to the barn. A hole had been cut into the wall of the generator room and the culvert extended almost to the barn with only a few sections remaining to be placed. In this case, it really did matter who I knew. Six men were filling sand bags to place above the dirt that had been pushed up against the walls of the barn.

“What are you going to do for the roof?”

“Your hay loft is full isn’t it?”

“Packed.”

“We may not do anything. If we do, we’ll do it last. We can’t put too much weight on the roof so we might be limited to a single layer of sandbags. Between that and the hay, they should be ok.”

“Have you seen Mac?”

“Mac and Sally moved the hogs to the barn and are working on the chickens. The dairy truck was by earlier and picked up the milk and eggs. Did you two brave the crowds?”

“Just a little. We got more tp, feminine supplies, coffee and spices. Plus I got several pairs of leather gloves at Wal-Mart. Someone cleaned out the last bit of their ammo.”

“I’ll bet the stores were a mad house.”

“You’re being too kind Kirby. People were fighting in the canned goods aisle. All of the water was gone and the meat case empty. Come to think of it, the bread aisle was bare. I hope they can freeze it or they’re going to end up with a lot of penicillin. Have you guys taken a break?”

“Sally made an urn of coffee and had soft drinks available.”

“I hope she didn’t use the French Market.”

“I think she said she used Maxwell House.”

We had two 36 cup urns we'd picked up from a clearance end cap at a Target store. That way, if we had guests, we could make an urn of 'regular' coffee and not get into our supply of French Market. The French Market was a trifle pricey and most people didn't really care for it. I don't know what brand of coffee the Air Force used other than it came from the lowest bidder.

In addition to cashing the CDs, I'd taken 80% of the balances of the farm account and our personal account. I excused myself and put the cash in the communications cabinet in the shelter. Next, I got one of those pairs of new gloves and lent a hand. By then, the last piece of culvert was in place and the ditch backfilled. One of Kirby's men was in the generator room using mortar to seal the cut in the wall.

Joanne was there and she was helping Eve making sandwiches for lunch. They were running a ham through our meat slicer building ham and cheese sandwiches. The second urn was perking and she said it would be ready by noon. We had picked up several large bags of potato chips from the grocery store. We also had two quarts of dill pickles, one plain and the other kosher.

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"What's this come to?"

"Sixteen men for 12 hours each at \$13 an hour. Call that \$2,500. Equipment use...call that \$500. One thousand sand bags at \$0.55 each, another \$550. I guess \$3,550."

"Hundreds ok?"

"One of my favorite politicians."

"I'll get the money out of the shelter."

We hadn't bother fixing supper for Kirby's men. It was late, 8:30, but we figured there was hot food at home waiting for them. At least Kirby hadn't had to eat as much expense as he would have if he'd given another paid day off. Joanne and Eve heated up the leftover chili and we had quite a selection, chili, ham sandwiches, chips, dill pickles and coffee. Before we ate, Susan, Eve and Sally bathed the kids and put them down. Susan turned in for the night and Mac, Sally, Kirby, Joanne, Eve and I put on Fox News.

Nobody had declared war against anyone else, outside of the Middle East. I had half expected Egypt and Libya to declare war against Israel. The UN was in emergency session with few agreeing about a course of action. Hugo Chavez was making his usual threats but Cuba was noticeably quiet. Fidel died in 2012 and Raul was the man in charge. He tended to be less outspoken than his brother had been.

There were protests in several nations' capitals urging the various governments to stay out of a war. Kind of like those Tax Days with a twist. And the differences were anything

but minor. I can't seem to remember anyone in the US using Molotov Cocktails or the military bringing in APCs and tanks. I think the closest thing I remember as being odd during that general time frame was Air Force One making a pass over Manhattan. Then again I might have the time frames mixed up.

As had become commonplace, the UN Security Council spent hours debating and were in the same position when they called a halt to the proceedings as they had been when the discussion opened. It's probably unnecessary to mention it was same oh, same oh. Sort of reminded me of that PAW story where an Air Force pilot bombed the UN. Bad idea, the US would probably be left to performing the cleanup at the country's expense.

"Honey, in view of your time in the Air Force, what's your best guess how this is going to turn out?"

"Well...we're either going to have a war, or not. If we do have one, all we can do is hope our preparations are adequate or at least close. If we don't, we're going to come up with a program rotating our LTS foods out and replace them with something more current. Either way, I'm going to check into a biodiesel plant so we have the ability to convert our canola oil to biodiesel. I also believe it might be smart to get a license from the BATFE to produce ethanol.

"Time permitting I'm going to work up a spreadsheet to keep track of our inventory of food, fuel and other consumables. I'll try to keep it simple, listing an ideal quantity, our current inventory and date of purchase. That's probably more important for our meds than anything else. Doc Miller gave me a list of maximum shelf life under ideal conditions. Very few of our drugs have shelf lives equal to the shelf life listed on the bottles. I might even store beer, but it has a very short shelf life."

"Does that apply to distilled spirits?"

"Once they're bottled, their shelf life is indeterminate. The statement 'aged for 12 years' and so forth applies to the holding time in the barrels."

"So we're not going to lose much of what we have stored?"

"I doubt it."

"You know I haven't had anything to drink since I met you although I do appreciate cocktail occasionally. Could we store some commercial spirits?"

"Sure, but if I do get a permit to produce ethanol, I could make some of the spirits. Kahlua is basically vodka with coffee beans soaked in it."

"Would be ok with you if I made up a list of my favorite drinks?"

“I’ll take that list and add mine to it too. We haven’t made provision for trade goods in event of a worst case scenario. Any ideas?”

“The obvious answer would be to have the vices for trade goods. We have 6 cans of heirloom seeds and can use those to produce more. Like you say. We can produce alcohol; but it’s just as likely that people would prefer something besides moonshine.”

“I have a relatively short list of the liquors I like to add to your list. With things settled down for the moment, we should drive into Sedalia and get an order in.”

My List: Bourbon – Maker’s Mark, Whiskey – Jack Daniels Black or Single Barrel, Scotch – Chivas Regal, Tequila – Jose Cuervo 1800, Gin – Bombay Sapphire, Liqueurs – Kahlua, Grand Marnier, Drambuie, Vodka – Stolichnaya or Absolute
Others – Courvoisier, Bénédictine, St. Remy VSOP napoleon brandy, Triple Sec, Vermouth – dry and sweet

Eve’s List: Tequila, Bourbon, Kahlua, Crème de Menthe, Crème de Cacao, Frangelico,

The next day, I went back to Sedalia and ordered anywhere from 4 bottles to a case from our lists. I made one exception and two cases of JD green label and one case each of JD Black, Gentleman Jack and Single barrel. For mixes, I used Seven Up, Squirt, Coke and Jose Cuervo Tequila mix. I also added 2 small bottles of bitters and several liters of tonic water.

For drinking wines, I got 2 cases each of Chardonnay, Chablis, Pinot Noir, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and 5 cases of a none vintage Champagne.

Although it was a large quantity of booze, it was enough to keep us in alcoholic beverages for years. I sure wished I could store 5 cases of Coors or Carlings Black label.

“Hi, honey, I placed the order and it will be in about three days from now. Please don’t tell me we missed something.”

“Now that you mention it, I think we covered our bases.”

“Are you certain?”

“Not really but nothing comes to mind. I saved the extra disposable diapers when I switched. I haven’t decided whether to keep the cloth diapers or use them for cleaning rags.”

“Are they still good or getting a bit ragged?”

“Yes.”

“It wasn’t a yes or no question.”

“The first batch of diapers go in the rag bin, the newer ones will be put up, just in case someone else needs them.”

Basically we were as close as we could come to actually being prepared for whatever came. No sooner than I had the thought, I realized we hadn't stocked on any of the 3M P-95 or P-100 disposable face masks or an alcohol based cleaning solution like Germ-X. Mac moved his 5kw portable generator and 5 5-gallon cans of gas to the generator room. I asked him for a list of supplies for the chain saws. See what I mean?

When I drove in to pick up the 3M masks and Germ-X I also picked up the cutlery. Mom had one oil lamp for every room in the house and they were stored in the basement. I bought 2 55-gallons drum of kerosene and a roll of $\frac{3}{4}$ " wicks plus two spare burners and four extra chimneys. The more we bought, the more we needed. While I was picking up the lamp parts, I realized we didn't have any hunting knives. I got the kids each a Buck folding blade and an Ontario Marine Corps fighting knife. Eve and I ended up with Cold Steel Laredo Bowies and identical folding knives. I also picked up 8 triple folding entrenching shovels with the case plus 2 24" Latin machetes and 2 Rifleman's Tomahawks. Why only 2 machetes? We don't have a lot of jungle in the area. Finally, the surplus store supplied 12 medium sized ALICE packs and 12 fanny packs.

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We just plain stopped buying more of anything after that last purchase except for groceries to maintain the pantry. After, we got the farrier out to trim and shoe the horses. It was only after I had the spreadsheet set up and the inventory that was on hand entered were we able to make a comprehensive review of our preparations. The items we missed would fit in a single large grocery sack and all were medical supplies like hydrocortisone and such. Nothing was lacking, but our quantities were light on several items. It wasn't worth the trip to Sedalia.

The following Sunday, we picked up the missing items after church and I began the task of loading all of the unloaded magazines to full capacity. Kirby mentioned after church that his Leupold scope came in two days earlier. His M1As were a Loaded and a National Match which he intended to use as a sniping rifle. We swapped copies of our inventories.

Our two freezers were full to almost overflowing. We agreed to go shooting at the range later that afternoon with our handguns. The gunsmith had sighted in his National Match with a laser bore sight and he only need minor adjustments. It was just the four of us with Susan tending to our children. President Palin was scheduled to address the nation concerning the Middle East at 8:00pm Central. Joanne and Kirby ate dinner with us and we watched the speech from the Oval office.

My fellow Americans,

At this time the UN Security Council remains deadlocked over the Israeli attacks on its neighboring counties. It is our intent to allow the issue to resolve itself. After meeting with senior Congressional officials it has been determined to withdraw our remaining forces engaged in the War on Terror. At this time, our country has anti-terror forces stationed in Afghanistan, the Philippines and Africa

Additionally we have European based NATO forces and a contingent of approximately 30,000 stationed in South Korea. All American troops are in the process of preparing their equipment for shipment and the removal of our forces will commence in a few short hours. This process is expected to be completed within 45 days or sooner.

Any attempt to interfere with or hamper this process will be dealt with harshly. Transport ships and aircraft will arrive on scene in just a few hours. Until such time as the process is completed, this nation's threat level will remain at the highest level and US military forces will remain at defense condition three.

It has become apparent to this administration that a run on food, water and other necessities has continued since Israel's preemptive strike against other Middle Eastern countries. Rest assured that the grocery industry has ample supplies to meet the needs of our nation.

While it has been and will remain the position of the United States to support Israel, since the establishment of that nation, this task is not without difficulties and risks. It is our fervent hope that the United Nations will respond positively to end the existing tensions. Until such time as our forces are once again on American soil, all leaves and passes are terminated effective at midnight tonight. Any military personnel unable to meet this deadline are urged to contact his or her installation to make arrangements for the quickest possible return to their base, station, camp, fort or post.

*Thank you and goodnight
God bless America.*

"What do you think?"

"Relying on the UN to accomplish anything is a mistake. She must realize that to be the case and bringing our troops home can only be seen as a positive move. I like it."

"If I didn't know better Mark, I say it sounds like she's circling the wagons."

"I agree with Kirby honey."

"Hey, me three," Joanne chuckled.

"That's entirely possible guys. It would be nice to revert to the policy of isolationism, even in this modern society. However, I wonder..."

“Yes? What?”

“It’s just that all of our personnel will be home should something happen.”

“You’ve sure been on a buying jag lately.”

“Just tying up loose ends Kirby.”

“Is there anything you two haven’t done?”

“We haven’t purchased any gold or silver since we were married. It’s just that the price is so out of reach.”

“But you have some, right?”

“We both do. Eve had hers from before and I had a buying program for a long time. Maybe if nothing comes of this, I should get a federal firearms license and sell all of the extra firearms we’ve acquired since we began raising a family.”

“Do I get first choice?”

“I was kidding!”

“I wasn’t. The Republicans won’t remain in office forever and I’d assume that the next Democrat makes a real play to get the guns.”

“In light of McDonald v. City of Chicago? I’m not so sure. It’s obvious that states can regulate but not prohibit.”

◦

It took closer to sixty days to complete the withdrawal of our military forces and equipment. The hard part was moving the equipment, the troops got to ride home on jet airplanes.

Unable to reach a satisfactory solution in the UN, Muslim countries blockaded the assembly en masse. The more powerful nations, especially the big five – US, UK, France, China and Russia notched up the status of their military forces. President Palin left our military at DEFCON 3 even after the troops and equipment were home. The DHS was caught between a rock and hard spot, the 5 tier, color coded, threat level had never been below yellow and they needed something higher than red.

The Vet – Chapter 9

The simple solution was to modify directive 3 and adjust the scale. The old yellow became green, orange became blue and red became yellow giving two more terror levels. The overriding consideration was the number of Muslims in the United States, any one of whom had the potential to wreak havoc.

Patriotic groups around the country began to consolidate forces, preparing to carry out their duty as outlined in Title 10 §311. Imports of ammunition dried up overnight and every ammunition manufacturer in the US began running their production lines 24/7. Firearms backorders stretched well beyond those experienced in late 2008 and early 2009. The overall price of ammunition fell slightly. The country was preparing although not one soul was exactly certain what they were preparing for.

The country didn't have to wait too long to answer that question, oil and gas pipelines in the Midwest began blowing up. Train tracks were blown up causing derailments and the BAFTE clamped down on explosives purchases. The only explosive difficult to control was the most popular, ANFO. The Department of Homeland security raised the threat level from yellow to orange, the new orange.

The weather cooperated and we had bumper crops. Mac and Sally said the following year would be their last and they would be moving to Doolittle. They had gone down over the winter and arranged for the installation of septic and had their well drilled. A site was leveled for their mobile home and they spent some time down there clearing timber and stacking it for future use. The Power Company had installed a transformer and a pole, running a line for electricity. The local phone company also ran a cable to provide them with telephone. I think perhaps our preparedness bent rubbed off to some extent, rather than a 550 gallon propane tank, they purchased and installed a 3,300 gallon tank.

We finally had all six potty trained and four of the six were reading the newspaper. Eve began home schooling Shelly and Bobby. Susan was turning out to be one of our best decisions. Not only was she fabulous with the children, she wasn't half bad with first aid. She was now totally in charge of maintaining our medical supplies. Our herd of milk cattle had grown to 16, the hog herd 18 and the Morgans to 12.

The generator proved its worth when we had a three week power outage resulting from another terrorist attack. Illegal immigration seemed to ebb due to some of the illegals being mistaken for Muslims. The large Muslim communities around the country began to form their own 'patriotic' (militia) groups. At least cooler heads prevailed and we avoided open warfare.

"Something is up Mark."

"Just my blood pressure Kirby."

“Get serious. It’s been over a year since Israel turned much of the Middle East into a glass slag pile. No major power had made a move to react to Israel’s actions. The boycotting Muslim countries have been ominously silent. I’ve built 23 shelters over the past year; people are getting very worried.”

“Maybe we were premature although it’s a lot easier filling in that it would be acquiring. Prices have raised sharply for LTS foods. The last replacement order we placed with Walton cost forty percent more than my first replacement order. I did pick up a bunch of M118LR for the M1As and several cans of Lake City M855A1. Eve and I discussed it and we’re looking into buying body armor. That’s going to be tricky, Dragon Skin is far too expensive and Interceptor unavailable for civilian sales. I did pick up an AN/PVS-22 UNS for my M21.”

“I thought you’d probably put a night scope on your model 70.”

“I could but I’d rather have it on the M21. Both rifles are suppressed so both would work as sniper rifles.”

“Start your kids shooting yet?”

“For crying out loud, Shelly and Bobby are only five. Give it a couple of years and we’ll start them on the 9422s.”

“By the way, David decided to work on his PhD and Julie is getting married just after the first of the year. You two are invited.”

“Getting married locally?”

“St. Louis.”

“Do you pick up I-70 to get there?”

“It’s the fastest and probably the shortest. Most days you can make it under 3 hours.”

“How fancy will it be?”

“It will be fairly simple, just the Best Man and the Maid of Honor. I was afraid she’d try and bankrupt me with extra groomsmen and bridesmaids.”

◦

Since it was easier now to get the M1022, I kept in practice with my Tac-50. Eve fired it some and said she’d stick with her Super Match. Those Ruger SR-556s were very dependable and made for an excellent backup.

In early December, a Methodist church in St. Louis was bombed. Terrorists were blamed. That wasn't what had us concerned. The fact that it was the church where Julie's wedding was scheduled to take place did. Eve and I had met Julie's fiancé at Thanksgiving. Come to think of it, I met Julie for the first time that day. She was the spitting image of Joanne. Her fiancé, Steve, was tall with a kind of quiet dignity. Julie was blonde, slender, 5'9 or 10 with a dazzling smile. Steve had raven hair, was also slender, 6'2 or 3, and powerful. One look at his neck and you could tell what his hobby was, weight lifting.

Steve said he liked to hunt for rabbits, squirrels and deer but his wasn't much of a wing shot. His rifles were limited to a Marlin 39A and a 336W. He did have a shotgun, his grandfather's Winchester model 12 and a handgun, a Ruger P90. Julie had her own firearms having been taught to shoot from an early age. She had an 870 Express Combo in 12 gauge, a Remington model 700BDL with a Leupold scope in .308. Her mother had bought her a Browning High-Power when she went off to college. Her other rifle was a Ruger 10/22. She didn't mention any single action firearms.

Because of the church bombing Steve and Julie were in Sedalia visiting with her mom and dad about moving the wedding from St. Louis to our church. I had a feeling that Kirby laid the law down because of his concerns for their safety and the fact that he was footing the bill. Eve and I weren't invited over until the issue was settled. The only detail that changed was the location.

Steve was working for a brokerage firm and Julie worked as a librarian. I assume he was doing well; he had a new BMW which he said was paid for. Julie was still driving the Chevrolet she'd gotten when she'd graduated from high school.

Paul, Kirby and Joanne's son, was also there for Thanksgiving. He looked a lot like Kirby but had an inch or two on his dad. His chosen field of study was physics. Paul said he didn't have any immediate plans to marry but he was seeing a graduate student, Francine, from Columbia who was also concentrating in physics. Francine was working on her Master's degree. Kirby said he was fairly certain that Francine was the one for Paul. Like Julie, Paul had a 700BDL with Leupold scope, an 870 express combo in 12 gauge, a 10/22 and a Springfield Armory XD in .45acp. However he had one rifle that she didn't, a Springfield Armory M1A Loaded model. He also didn't mention any single action firearms.

The ATF had several persons of interest relating the bombing but no real suspects. They were working in a combined effort with the FBI. The task force had expressed the opinion that the bombing was related to a Muslim group from Los Angeles. A White House source stated that most, if not all, of the recent terrorist incidents were related to that same group. A reward was offered for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the individuals responsible for the terrorist acts that now numbered at 17.

With the revised wedding plans, Steve and Julie would have to contact those they'd sent invitations to and give them the new information. After they left to return to St. Lou-

is, Kirby took me aside and ask for a favor. He wanted to know if Eve and I'd be willing to go armed at the wedding, stating that Joanne and he would be regardless. He'd somehow get it cleared with our minister. It would be the first wedding I'd ever attended where anyone was armed with more than ceremonial swords. I responded that I would but Eve would have to decide for herself.

The wedding went off without out a hitch 5 weeks later. The happy couple headed to Miami for a 6 day honeymoon. Kirby and I loaded their wedding presents and drove them up to St. Lewis taking Eve and Joanne with us for a night on the town. The restaurant wasn't posted and derived close to 80% of its revenues from food sales. We stayed over and left after breakfast the next morning.

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Around Valentine's Day, Paul called to inform Kirby and Joanne that Francine and he had married. Apparently they hadn't been as careful as they thought they'd been. They had decided to forgo the trappings and have private wedding in front of a judge. He said that they'd be down on spring break and everyone could get acquainted.

If either Kirby or Joanne was disappointed, they did a good job of concealing it. Besides it seemed there were bigger fish to fry. After a long stalemate and a flurry of behind the scene activities, the Muslim world was ready to address the previous Israeli attacks. It began with the issuance of a Fatwa and a declaration of a Major Jihad. Since both have different meanings depending on the sect, the Fatwa was carefully worded.

The statement of their intent to use any and all means at their disposal sent chills down more than one leader's spine. It took the administration several days of discussion to develop a plan. The President requested the opportunity to appear before a joint session of Congress. Her requests were met with mixed reactions. Additional funding would be approved to allow federal, state, county and local governments to increase investigations on the local Muslim populations. Posse Comitatus would not be suspended for the duration. Holding camps for militants would not be established until existing facilities reached capacity. The unorganized militia would be placed on notice of the possible need for their services.

TOM posted a statement at Frugal's I found interesting. It was three words long, "Lock and Load."

I finally tracked down the buddy still on active duty and arranged for 12 sets of Interceptor with the extra panels and plates. I gave six sets to Kibry for his family and kept six for us. Two went to Mac and Sally, one to Susan, a pair to Eve and I and one held in reserve. We completed an inventory of our supplies in late March and ordered replacements or traveled to Wal-Mart, Sam's Club and Costco to fill the holes. For the first time this year, we ordered Durum wheat in addition to the hard red we usually bought.

This was the last year we'd have Mac and Sally's services and I made a point to pick his brain concerning anything and everything about and around the farm. They were scheduled to move two weeks after harvest was completed. Eve ordered more lids and jars from Canning Pantry and an expanded garden was planted. We had been planting enough to get us and Mac through to the next garden harvest but felt that more was better. Some of the berry bushes were beginning to produce large amounts of fruit and we added jelly jars for the first time.

As we began to approach fall, Eve added John and Andy to the home schooling schedule. When the crops were in, Mac lined up a service to tow their trailer to Doolittle. Eve boxed up $\frac{1}{4}$ of the canned goods to give them a head start on food supplies. The last thing I did was help Mac install a high efficiency wood burning stove in the mobile home's living room.

"We'd like to thank you kindly for the extra things you've done Matt. One thing though, I'd like you to take back the body armor. We've talked it over and simply don't see the need. If you get another hired hand, maybe he and his wife would get some use from it."

"I meant for you to keep it."

"I know and I still say we don't see the need. Well, unless they start arming the fish with AK-47s. If they do, I'll let you know. We're mostly going to be taking it easy; plant a small garden, cut some firewood and go fishing. We've done alright on this job and should be fairly comfortable."

The mover rearranged and strapped down the furniture and off they went. We would need a new farm truck; the GMC belonged to Mac and Sally. We were going to miss them but it also gave us the opportunity to find a younger man to help. Eve and I discussed it and decided we wanted someone raised on a farm who knew livestock. If he was married, that would be a plus. We had all winter to look, or so we thought.

We were in the middle of putting the last of our replacement goods in the tunnel and pantry when the NOAA radio went off. It wasn't an Air Defense Emergency but was nearly as bad. Four nuclear weapons, believed to be atomic bombs, had been detonated. The locations were New York in the vicinity of the UN, Washington DC in the vicinity of the Capitol, Chicago near the Sears Tower and at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. Estimated yield varied according to the news source but they seemed to be on the order of 25kT. The location of the last one didn't make much sense until race riots broke out.

At the farm, we basically went on lockdown. Weapons were removed from the shelter and kept close at hand. I did all of the chores including gathering the eggs and Eve kept a wary eye. Joanne called asked Eve's opinion of circling the wagons, ergo, bring their children home.

"Joanne called."

“What’s up?”

“She wanted to know if they should suggest that their kids come home.”

“What did you tell her?”

“I didn’t say yes or no. I did point out that St. Louis was a major city and could conceivably become a target. She said she’d talk over with Kirby before they decided.”

“I think it’s begun. We really need a new hired man and I think I’ll add one additional criteria, he has to be former military, either a Marine or Army Noncom. At least we won’t need to buy any firearms thanks to our pre-buying for the children.”

“Try and find a married one, I could use the help. It’s been a real chore keeping the house up since Gloria got angry over our hiring Sarah and just up and quit. Fortunately Sally lent a hand or who knows what the place would look like.”

“I think we’ll have to get a mobile home if they don’t have one. I’m getting hungry, what did you fix for supper?”

“Meatloaf, baked and a salad. I baked bread today too.”

“Cinnamon rolls?”

“You bet; frosted no less.”

Eve usually included one French loaf, slit open at the top and butter added. The Cinnamon rolls were rolled out bread dough topped with butter, sugar and cinnamon and then rolled it up, sliced and put in a cake pan to rise. The frosting was powdered sugar and milk with either vanilla or almond extract.

We bought an old Dodge pickup with a non-electronic diesel, crew cab and 8’ bed. I had it gone through front to back and anything even iffy replaced. Then, I had new tires put on and bought an additional five mounted on rims. As I’d done before, I got a complete set of extra belts and hoses and a set of brake pads.

The ad for a hired man we’d place in the paper got an unusually large response. The applicant we chose had been a Marine staff sergeant and was married. They had one child, a teenager. Randy and Maria had their own mobile home and we paid to have it towed and installed. Their daughter Amy attended school in Sedalia and rode the bus. Their old Toyota was about on its last legs and we told him to go ahead and use the Dodge.

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Joanne and Kirby couldn't get their kids to come home. Paul would have his PhD in the spring and Steve wasn't prepared to give up his level of earnings. Julie went along with Steve, for the time being. Francine would have her Master's Degree at the same time as Paul got his PhD in physics.

It was an especially hard winter and perhaps because it, terror incidents fell off. The ATF/FBI task force was no closer to a solution than when they began. I didn't give much thought to the fact that Pakistan was nuclear nation, my bad. The four weapons detonated around the country had been brought into the country via Mexico. Additional weapons were brought in and it was only by chance that the Border Patrol intercepted one. They had no idea if it was the 1st or the 30th.

President Palin immediately closed both borders and enforced it with the military. It was an all-out effort with squad sized camps at intervals, roving patrols and aircraft flying cover. Commercial traffic was allowed to pass after a thorough inspection. Care was taken to avoid offending either the Canadian or Mexican governments. All remote entry stations were closed.

During the midterm elections in 2014, the Republican Party increased the number of seats in both houses of Congress. Despite the nuclear attacks, Palin was doing very well in the polls with a 60-65% approval rating.

The hard work and careful diet kept my diabetes in check and I continued to not need the Avandia although I never missed a chance to pick up samples when I had the chance. I used a blood pressure wrist cuff and a Bayer Ultra 2 to monitor my blood pressure and sugar.

Randy and I had just finished extracting the oil from the canola, preparing the canola oil for market when the NOAA SAME radio went off. The announcement was brief and to the point, several additional nuclear weapons had been detonated around the country.

"Come on, I'll fit you out and we'll get on the TV."

I equipped him with ALICE gear, an M1A, a 590A1 and a PT1911. He took SR-556s and Browning High-Powers for Maria and Amy. Joanne had taken her M1A, shotgun and Taurus and had equipped Susan with a Browning.

Twenty-three weapons had been detonated and a NEST team found the 24th which had a faulty timer mechanism. The weapons were all atomic rather hydrogen bombs, the same as the first time. The military, federal, state, county and local law enforcement quickly rounded up our Muslim population and placed them in camps for protection from the American public.

The camps were located on military installations and weren't fenced in. There was a hue and cry and comments about doing the same to them as had been done to the Japanese during WW II. The Commander in Chief soon instructed the Joint Chiefs to

allow anyone who wanted to leave, released – after they had signed a release absolving the federal, state, county and local governments of responsibility for anything that happened to them after they were released. Despite the MSM being harshly critical of President Palin, her numbers in the polls edged up to an approval rating of between 65-70%.

The Vet – Chapter 10

The majority of those that chose to leave were young, single men. It was Fox that noticed the fact and reported it. The other networks remained silent limiting their reports to simple acknowledgements of some people being released. Other countries discussed doing the same but their legislative bodies forbade it.

Randy liked the Super Match well enough that he bought his own, plus a Loaded model and returned the Super Match. Maybe I was paying them too much because he got his own 590A1 and returned that too. Finally, he returned the Taurus after replacing it. Because Maria was such a big help, Eve insisted on paying her as well. I wasn't surprised when she, too, began acquiring firearms identical to those Randy had selected. She claimed to Eve that they were to allow her to defend Amy.

When Amy got a Bushmaster with the piston conversion, we suddenly found it difficult to believe Maria's claim. It was followed in short order with a Beretta model 92FS and later with a Remington Express combo in 12 gauge and a Choate magazine extension. Randy had seen our ammunition stockpile and limited their purchases to 1,000 rounds for each M1A and the Bushmaster. The same applied to shotgun ammo, one case each of slugs, 00 buck and #4 buck. Ammo for their handguns was limited to 1,000 rounds of .45acp Gold Dot and 500 rounds of 9mm +P Gold Dot.

"I noticed you only have iron sights."

"Scopes are expensive and can break, I didn't see the need."

"How are you fixed on magazines?"

"Ordered some from 44magnum dot com. Got 3 complete sets of ALICE gear too. I'm surprised you don't have some of those cowboy canteens for your horses."

"I've never seen them."

"Search for Oasis canteens."

It worked, of course. I bought a dozen 2 quart and a dozen 4 quart. We had accumulated camping gear including a huge family tent, multi fuel Coleman stoves, a sun bag shower with enclosure and a chemical toilet with separate enclosure. All of it bought when it had been on sale.

Sarah had a new running mate for the November 2016 election, a prominent name that had been in the news recently. McKeon declined to run citing his age. He was either 79 or fast approaching it.

The US was engaged in a massive cleanup project. It would take another two years before the country could begin rebuilding. The sentiment was to not rebuild and instead

build new cities away from the original locations. When people were interviewed, most claimed they were afraid of residual radiation.

Shelia and Stephanie were now reading the newspaper and Eve was home schooling the other four. It was only allowed because she had her teaching certificate and we had the recommended books required by the school system. Some would be dated by the time we got to them, but the quality of textbooks hadn't improved. About the only change to the good was more current information. The year books for the Encyclopedia would provide any needed updates.

I was able to buy the quarter section that John had sold off. It was an open field and I decided to use the 160 for canola and use the forty for oats. With luck, I could buy feed supplements and blend our own feed. We now had 8 horses of riding age and started Bobby and Shelly riding. Eve and I felt they were old enough to learn to shoot the 9422s. I ordered another case of solid points and rotated out the old. Although John and Andy were only six, we relented and allow them to learn to ride and shoot too.

The new trans-Canadian pipeline opened and pumped the first barrels of oil from ANWR and the new wells off the California coast began pumping natural gas. Repairs had been made to all of the rail lines and pipelines demolished by the terrorists. The joint ATF/FBI task force was disbanded. While we weren't meeting our energy needs, we were closer. China was the major benefactor of the Israeli attacks against the Middle Eastern countries, becoming the new sole customer of their oil.

Unknown to any intelligence services, there was a plot afoot to bring the Great Satan to its knees along with its ally Israel. One Iranian nuclear plant had escaped the notice of everyone including Israel, the US and Russia. The Pakistanis were suspected of being the source of the atomic bombs used against the US cities, but their weapons count seemed to be intact. IAEA inspectors put their weapons count at 68. India's weapons count remained at 96.

Nobody knew how many weapons Argentine, Brazil or Syria had. North Korea claimed to have 'more than a dozen' but they lacked a delivery system. I'm telling you it was worse than the cold war with this many countries having nuclear weapons. The bad thing about arms races was that historically they always ended with someone using their arms.

The only countries really acting responsibly was Russia and the US. They had further reduced the numbers of weapons each had. The new number seemed to equal the number of Minuteman III missiles times three plus the number of D-5s times 8 plus the combined total of our bomber carry capacity and a few more for fighter aircraft. It wasn't so much us reducing arms as it was Russia. They matched us weapon for weapon and additionally their estimate of Chinese weapons. Like us, they didn't dismantle the actual weapons, instead placing them in a strategic reserve.

Those B-2s taking off way back when...a show of force, nothing more. They were loaded, however. Rumors floating around the amateur channels suggested that the B-1Bs had been retrofitted. The remaining B-52s had been given yet another life extension package. Russia meanwhile was looking at retiring the Bears on a one for one basis as they rolled additional TU-160s off the assembly line. Instead, they designated them as TU-142s.

That plot? We didn't know about it until it happened. Randy was out in the field cultivating corn. I was on my way home from Sedalia. Maria was working in the garden and Eve was teaching the six their lessons. Susan was helping Maria by changing beds. Amy was in school. My portable NOAA radio went off and I increased my pace because I was close to home. Randy had lifted the cultivator and was chugging down the lane headed for home.

We turned on the TV and no sooner than the words Air Defense Emergency were uttered than Randy bolted, fired up the Dodge and headed for Sedalia. Air Defense Emergency is the term that denotes inbound missiles. I ran over the state of our preparations in my head. The diesel tanks had been topped off the previous week. The propane tank had been topped off in June. We'd gotten the recalibrated radiation instruments back on June 16th. The food supplies had been filled out in May.

We began the process of moving things to the shelter. The pot of stew was moved to the range in the shelter and the rising loaves of bread moved to the shelter counter. The refrigerator was quickly emptied and I began moving the sandbags to close off the doors to the barn. As soon as the things in the house were completed, Susan took the children to the shelter and Eve and Maria joined me to move the sand bags. We had finished and were headed back to the house when Randy and Amy arrived. He skidded to a stop and he and Amy headed to the mobile home to get their firearms and 3 packed suitcases. I grabbed my Cabela's game cart and we loaded up what ammo they had and the suitcases. He locked the trailer and we moved to the house and then the basement.

Last minute items were taken care of, like removing the radios from all of the vehicles, making sure the house was locked and many of those last minute details that were so easy to forget. Collecting the radios actually came when I got to the shelter and saw Eve because she'd sold me the radios so long ago.

Susan had the TV in the shelter on and it appeared to be the real deal. It had started when two Argentinean tankers had appeared at an off load facility on the Gulf Coast. While the tankers hadn't been expected, the oil was welcome. After the first was unloaded, it waited around for the second to be unloaded. They then swung closer to the coast but separate and the ten Mt. bombs each was carrying were detonated. To coincide with that event, China launched more missiles than they had. While most were directed against us, a few were directed against Russia.

Both Russia and the US launched against China and for good measure, North Korea. It was another of those situations where we had the right idea, but... North Korea had loaded its weapons aboard various cargos ships and they were docked at ports on the west coast. This time it wasn't the ghetto that got blown to kingdom come, it was the harbor. San Diego, San Pedro, San Francisco, Portland and Seattle all had one or more weapons detonated. That's when the TV died.

There wasn't much to do except milk the cows and collect the eggs from the chickens in their new permanent home in the barn. As near as I could tell, someone must have hit Whiteman. The radiation peaked quickly and was far higher than I expected. I used the 500R survey meter in the barn and the level was higher than I liked, but acceptable. I wondered if Joanne and Kirby's kids had made it home from St. Louis.

The radiation peaked at 650R. I plugged the numbers in the spreadsheet and came up with 68 days. At half power, we had enough diesel for around 5,000 hours. I could switch to the portable diesel when I needed to change the oil. It was rated at 10kw. I didn't have many extra filters for it and only intended to use it when I serviced the big generator.

Amy had her school books with her and Eve picked up when Amy's teachers had left off. Teaching became a major activity to divert the 7 children's attention from what was going on in the world. Sarah and Maria took over the cooking duties while Randy and I worked 3 on and three off. He caught the livestock in the morning and I tended to them in the evening. The house alarm went off about a week into the event. We decided that if whoever it was wanted the pantry contents enough to die for them, it was their choice. I'd dropped the bar against the door to the basement and would have heard any attempt to breach it.

The alarm had an automatic shutoff, thank God. I was about ready to cut the wires when it shut down. Don't believe Forest Gump's mother, sometimes you do know what you're going to get. I woke Randy and he and I went to the barn in case they broke in there, but they didn't. We each carried a suppressed Super Match so we wouldn't frighten the livestock. While the suppressed rifles weren't totally silent unless subsonic ammo was used, I assumed that the absence of the sharp crack would avoid frightening the animals.

During those 68 days we ate at a lot of chili, stews and casseroles. We always had fresh bread and granola if someone didn't want bacon and eggs. Most of the time Eve, Maria or Susan cut slices from a Cure 81 and we'd have soup and ham sandwiches for lunch. When a large round roast was cooked, we ate roast beef sandwiches instead. For something different, I occasionally had breakfast burritos made with sausage, scrambled eggs and bell peppers and flour tortillas from the freezer.

We used a variation on the tuna and noodle casserole, sometimes substituting the Kirkland chicken. It was even more popular than the tuna and noodles. We also had some of those large pizzas from Costco in the freezer and would cook a couple of those and

break out Coca Cola. One night after an especially boring day, I pulled out a bottle of Jack Daniels Black label and a six pack of Squirt. The ladies opted to chill and open a bottle of Chablis. Well hell, the world might or might not have ended but that didn't mean we weren't entitled to an occasional comfort.

It was three weeks before I heard Kirby on the business band radio. He said that the kids were safe because they'd headed to their place the minute the bombs went off on the Gulf Coast. He commented that had the attackers done a better job of coordinating their schedules, it might have not been the case.

"You remember that bombing at the church in St. Louis?"

"Sure do, what about it?"

"It seems it lit a fire under Steve and they're as well equipped firearms wise as we are. I don't know what Paul was thinking but Francine has exactly the firearms he has. I think they got together and did a group buy, but it hasn't come up. They did each have a sixty day supply of food for two and more than enough surplus."

"You and Joanne taught them right Kirby; it was just a matter of your kids getting their spouses attention."

"There more truth in that than you may realize. The M1As are the Loaded, but have a 4rd generation mount and a variable power Leupold scope. They have both 20 round and 5 round magazines to use for hunting along with some soft pointed ammo. They also got ALICE gear with fanny packs, a pair of canteens, 2 Ripoff double magazine pouches, a compass case and a large bandage case."

"Anything else?"

"They updated all of their vaccinations and each bought a trauma kit. Each pair has a Katadyn filter and a GPS."

"Ammo?"

"Military surplus for the rifles and handguns, commercial low recoil for the shotguns."

"I figure about another 47 days."

"That coincides with my figures. We had a break in but at most, they cleaned out the pantry."

"When did that happen?"

"Maybe a week in."

“I’ll bring my shovel just in case.” Same bat time, same bat channel tomorrow?”

“TTYL.”

o

We talked briefly on a daily basis for the next 7 weeks, eventually switching to the amateur radios on the 2 meter band. When the radiation finally dipped below 100mR, Randy and I suited up and checked over the house. The looters had taken surprising little, limiting themselves to prepackaged meals. That made me suspect that they were men. Had a woman been along she wouldn’t have limited her choices that closely.

A glance out the windows on each side of the house didn’t reveal any bodies or people hanging out. The back door was standing open and there was a little snow accumulated on the kitchen floor. Randy grabbed a broom and swept up while I started a fire in the furnace using coal. The pantry looked about like I’d expected. Ready to eat canned foods were missing, like ravioli, soup and beef stew. So was the partial can of Maxwell House.

“You ready to check outside?”

“It’s awful damned cold. Ok if I get a jacket? You need one?”

“I have a sweater on underneath, take your time and get what you need.”

He returned saying he’d added a sweater and handed me my shotgun. “Maria will be up to mop the kitchen floor. I told everyone we didn’t see anybody out or about.”

“Let’s go see if that’s the truth.”

Slinging the shotguns barrel down over our left shoulders, we eased out and checked everything on the homestead cautiously. We didn’t see one sign of a soul, living or dead. Randy’s trailer hadn’t been broken in, maybe ‘they’ thought the occupants were at the main house. He cranked the furnace up from 55° to 70° to allow the mobile home to warm. Spraying off the suits with a garden hose after we’d removed the weapons and ALICE gear, we towed off and return to the basement. The radiation level in the basement was low, ~30mR.

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“The coast is clear. The house and trailer should be warm in a short time. Whoever broke in didn’t take much, just the easy to prepare things. We’ll sleep here for the interim, but the basement is okay to use and the house will be ready for full time occupancy in another month.”

“Joanne called on the business band. Kirby, Steve and Paul were doing the same at their place. Did you check the vehicles?”

“I think they may be hard to start, they’ve been sitting in the cold for two months. I’ll run extension cords to connect the tank heaters and engine oil heaters. The fuel should be ok, it’s stabilized. Unless I knew better, I’d think it was just another day in Paradise.”

“How deep is the snow?”

“Depending on location, anywhere from a foot to several feet. The sky is mostly clear and there’s a fair amount of wind. I didn’t think to check the weather station.”

“What do you want to supper? I think a celebration is in order. I took out steaks, but we can have something else, they’re not thawed.”

“A steak sounds good. So does a nip of JD to warm my cold bones.”

“Just don’t get carried away, it will screw up your blood sugar.”

“Randy, how’s a highball sound?”

“It was cold. I guess I mean, sure, why not. Don’t want to use up your booze.”

“The JD is the one we have the most of. We have others if you’d like something else.”

“The black label will be just fine.”

o

“Kirby, got your ears on?”

“Yeah, just got back inside. How bad did you get hit?”

“Canned meals, some soup. Nothing we don’t have a lot of already. Want to come over for a while? Everyone is close to stir crazy.”

“Sure. That reminds me, I have to run extension cords and plug in the vehicles.”

“How are you on fuel?”

“We didn’t top off the gas tank so maybe 400 of that. I’d guess we only burned 5,000-gallons of diesel or less.”

“I’ll replace the engine computer in the pickup and see you in about an hour.”

“Call when you get close, we’ll probably be a little jumpy.”

“Hang on...you did...thank you. We’re coming over now, Paul changed out the computer. Plugged in that gadget and said everything was good to go.”

The gadget was a test instrument that dealers and mechanics use to read the computer in late model cars. I think that it may also allow you to change settings. The dealers charge an arm and a leg because the gadget costs over four grand. Maybe more, it’s been a while since I checked. Randy’s car was an old Toyota beater. Susan was only marginally better, she had an old Honda. I think a good tune-up would serve to get the cars into good condition.

“I thought you said you’d be right over.”

“I didn’t count on the condition of the road. Wee-doggie every shaded spot was nearly impassable. You don’t look any the worse for wear.”

“I’m fine. So, what’s this about cabin fever?”

“It was just being cooped up for so long.”

“You’re lucky. Paul and Steve have been at each other’s throats since about the second day in. They’re both bigger than me and I was leery of interfering. What it mostly boiled down to Paul discussing the physics involved and Steve insisting it couldn’t possibly be that bad. It sort of settled down when Paul pointed out the obvious, the snow. He’s a big believer in nuclear winter. Did you hear about St. Louis?”

“It got hit?”

“It did. Most of the missile targets were geological or military bases. You know about the Gulf Coast and the West Coast ports I take it?”

”It was on TV before it crashed.”

“I’ve been picking up a lot of chatter on my Icom.”

“Any of the geological targets let loose?”

“Nary a one. Doesn’t mean they won’t of course. There were no immediate eruptions earthquakes and the like. With the exception of Los Angeles, none of the initial strikes was followed up with a second strike. They did hit Whiteman I’m afraid.”

“I sort of figured that when the radiation jumped quickly and was relatively high.”

“Steve is all hot and bothered about getting back to St. Louis to see if he still has a job. Of course Paul and Francine both graduated and they were talking about the possibility of trying to get jobs in Columbia. They have a choice, the University of Missouri, Columbia College and Stephens College.”

“Stay for supper? Eve took out steaks.”

“I’ll call Paul and let him know we’ve been delayed.”

Eve had only taken out six steaks. When she heard me ask Kirby, she hurriedly pulled out two more. Our children would be perfectly happy with hamburgers and French fries. Susan and Maria hadn’t fixed any the entire time we’d been in the shelter. They could even have drumsticks for desert. Eve called a teacher’s holiday and we had a chance to get caught up with Joanne and Kirby. I learned that one of the shelters he built was for our farrier. I could only hope he and his family made it through. It was past time to shoe the horses and I didn’t want to chance riding them until they were shod.

Since Mac took his chainsaw with him, we’d need one or two of those with accessories. I had a steno pad and as things came to mind, I added them to the list. Diesel also went on the list, but propane could wait. If we got the two cars running, we’d need more gas. Kirby noticed me making the list and asked what it was about. I told him I was listing things that came to mind that we would need. He suggested that Randy, he and I go to Sedalia and pick up the chain saw and ignition parts for the two cars.

I felt sure that some people would be out and about in Sedalia, if for no other reason than Kirby and other contractors build a large number of shelters. Either those with shelters hadn’t come out or they’d gone somewhere; it was a mystery. We picked up two chain saws, one with a 36” bar and one with an 18” bar. We also got chain oil, engine oil, oil to add to the gas and several spare chains. I made a list which included the prices of everything we took and left the list and cash in the cash register.

We then went to a car parts store and got 3 complete sets of ignition parts for both of the cars. Since we were there, I added a few cases of motor oil, air, gas and fuel filters plus some for the Dodge, Chevy and Jeep. An oil change shop provided drums of 10w-30 Castrol oil. We got back just as Eve was putting the potatoes in the oven. That gave us time to service Randy’s car. We had another highball before supper and Kirby and Joanne left about an hour after supper was done. Susan bathed the children and Eve and Amy took them down to the shelter and tucked them in. Amy volunteered to keep an eye on them in case any of them woke.

The next morning after chores, Randy and I tried the Toyota. It needed a new battery and possibly a starter. So I wrote down battery, starter and starter relay. We hooked up the charger while we worked on Susan's Honda. It started when we tried. Randy and I stopped by Kirby's on the way to town to get an extra gun hand. Next, we went by the fuel dealer's and picked up a load of gas and a load of diesel. While Randy finished up his car, Kirby and I topped off the diesel tank and parked the gasoline delivery truck. I blended in 2½ gallons of PRI-G to keep the fuel good, stirring it with the measuring stick for the diesel tanks.

We took Kirby home and there was a battle Royale going on between Steve and Paul. It was obviously coming to a head. Francine was sitting in a chair bawling her eyes out. Joanne was standing between Steve and Paul. Julie was speaking to Steve and we caught the end, "...and don't let the door hit you on the butt on your way out!"

Steve let with only his suitcase.

"What in the name of God is going on?"

"Steve..."

"Let me explain Paul. Daddy, you know how Steve's been since we got here; spoiling for a fight with anyone who would argue. While he's mostly been on Paul's case, the two of you have crossed swords more than once. This morning he packed his suitcase and absolutely insisted he go to St. Louis. He's just totally detached from reality. First mom tried to stop him and after he told her off, Paul stepped in ready to kick butt and take names. Then I tried to reason with him but he wouldn't listen. Then he made a crack that if I didn't go, it was fine with him. He claimed there were plenty of women in the world who wanted a sugar daddy. I told him to go to hell and not let the door hit him on the butt on his way out. I'm so sorry."

"Nothing to be sorry about Julie. What if you had 2 or 3 kids and the same thing happened? Better to know now than find out later."

Steve had taken exactly what we saw, one suitcase. Both his and Julie's firearms were locked in Kirby's gun safe. I was reasonably certain that should he come back he wouldn't be welcome. Look at it this way, Julie now has two complete set of firearms and was clear of a pompous horse's behind. The tears were sliding down her cheeks. Then a smile came to her face and she said, "Maybe God was warning me when he had those terrorists blow up the church. I'm not too happy at the moment, but I will be ok."

Francine was tightly ensconced in Paul's arms, the tears having faded. Joanne had a somewhat relieved look on her face and Kirby had been seething since Julie had related the sugar daddy comment. It was an interesting introduction to a Post-Apocalyptic World. She left to change into jeans, her cowboy boots, a western cut blouse and her belt with the large oval buckle. She had a six-gun strapped on and was carrying a Winchester rifle.

“Single Action shooting?”

“Well, no,” Kirby replied. “You aren’t the only one with a yearning for quality firearms. We all have a revolver and a rifle in .45 Colt. The shotguns are model 1897 pumps configured as trench guns. Heat shield, 20” barrel but no bayonet lug. Family heirlooms.”

“How many sets?”

“Um...six. The Winchesters were a recent addition. Bought them around the time Winchester was closing up shop.”

“Funny, cowboys without horses.”

“But I know where I can get a six stall horse trailer and the guy who sold me your mare and stallion had a large herd. I can pay in gold, if need be. Figure I could buy 5 or 6 mares and get stud services from you. I wonder...”

“What?”

“If it might not be a good idea to strike while the iron’s hot. Maybe 5 mares and a stallion, just in case.”

“We’d better get home guys. Let me know if you decide to go to Kentucky.”

Kirby was lost in thought and muttered something. Joanne gave a little wave and we headed home. When I got home, I cornered Randy and suggested it might be a good time to go check out I-70 for a tanker or three. Eve overheard and insisted on going along. We went back to Sedalia, picked up US 65 and headed north. Once at the interstate, we headed west, in the direction of Kansas City. A few miles down the road we spotted a tanker in the eastbound lanes. We checked it out and it was diesel. We got back in and continued west. A few miles later there was another tanker in the east bound lanes and it contained diesel too.

We crossed the median and jumped the tractor giving it just enough juice to start. Randy took the driver’s seat and I hopped in to learn the shifting. I’d never driven a semi before. Eve pulled to a stop at the first tanker and we used the jumper cables to connect the batteries to the running truck. It finally started and I then got a look at the shifter. It was totally different from the other truck.

“Can you drive it? It’s completely different from the other one.”

“If it has wheels, I can drive it. Get the gearing figured out on the other one?”

“Maybe enough to get it home, I hope.”

One was a tandem trailer rig with two 8,000-gallon tanks. The other, the one I drove, was a single 10,000-gallon tank. Let's see, 26,000-gallons at \$3.199 a gallon is... a lot. Didn't bring my calculator. We managed and in my case it was barely, to get the semis to the farm. We had almost doubled our fuel supply. We had the ~500-gallons of gas in the farm tank plus 3,000 more in the delivery truck. Both tanks were close to full and we had another 26,000 gallons of soon to be stabilized diesel.

Maria had boiled pinto beans and made Spanish rice. She also thawed a package of corn tortillas. I was leery but it was very good. The remainder of the Chablis was on the table and I passed. If there would have been a Coors, it might have been a different story.

We mostly ate in silence, except for Eve and Maria. Eve asked her what other dishes she prepared with a Mexican flair. Maria launched a long winded discourse concentrating mainly on chicken and pork. Many of the dishes included rice and considering our stores of rice, it appeared we wouldn't have any one dish more than 4 times a year. Maria wasn't Mexican; she was a Filipino and spoke English, Spanish, Filipino and Tagalog. The Spanish was, she said, an optional language. The official language was English and Filipino, a de facto version of Tagalog. She learned Spanish in school. In her area around Manila, Tagalog was the most common language spoken. Besides the more common dishes from the Philippines, she had picked up many Mexican dishes plus a few Cuban and Spanish. Before dinner was over, Maria became our new cook.

I got to thinking about Kirby and a trip to Kentucky. He had a six horse trailer available and if I could find another or even a 4 horse trailer, I could buy some geldings and we'd have all of the riding stock we wanted. I went to the shelter and set out 18 one ounce Eagles and set my mind to going back to Kirby and Joanne's the next day. When we went to bed, I outlined my plans to Eve and she was excited.

"Think you can come up with a second six-horse trailer?"

"You have a good sized herd of horses Mark."

"We don't have as many riding horses as I'd like. Well, can you?"

"I can get three if it's necessary."

"You lead and I'll follow."

"More Morgans?"

"Yes, all geldings. Preferably 5 year olds. And tack of course."

"How much gold do you have?"

"I brought 18 ounces. If it isn't enough, I just get less tack or fewer horses."

“It should be enough, but barely. You might want to add another three ounces if you have it.”

“I do Kirby and more besides.”

“Let’s go. Drive over tomorrow?”

“That’s pretty much what I had in mind. Can we do it in one day?”

“It would be a very long day.”

“I can handle long days. I don’t really want to be away from home overnight.”

We got the trailers, both six-horse, and went home. Kirby agreed to pick me up around 6am the next morning. Studying the map, I was guessing about 6 hours each way. Add another few hours for the horse trading and with luck we’d be home by midnight. The trip back would be the bad part and I had no idea how many times we’d have to stop. It had been a while since I made the trip to get Evelyn’s wedding present.

I got up at five the next morning, cleaned up and had breakfast. Kirby pulled in around 5:45 and I got in the Dodge and we headed out. We were at the farm where I bought Eve’s horses by 11:30. Kirby got his horses there, a stallion and five mares. Next, we went to the farm where he bought my stallion and mare. The guy was there, but it seemed like nobody was home.

He had a strange faraway look in his eyes. He remembered Kirby and asked if he wanted another stallion and mare. I interrupted and said that I was the customer this time and was looking for 6 5 year old geldings with tack. He led us to a field and told us to pick out what we wanted. He’d set the price after we chose. Kirby checked the teeth and pickled out six nice looking geldings. When he pointed them out, the guy put them in a holding corral.

Kirby asked if he was alright and the man responded that his wife had been away from home on the day of the attack. She was applying for a position at a military installation and he was still waiting for her to come home. He asked for our best offer and I said 9 ounces of gold for the six horses and their tack. I undercut what I was willing to pay because I expected him to come back with a counter offer and we could dicker to a price in between.

“Nine ounces? Real gold?”

“Minted at West Point.”

“Done.”

“Does that include the tack?”

“Harness, bridle, saddle, saddlebags and lariat.”

“Have any rifle scabbards?”

“Got some, how many?”

“A dozen.”

“Ten ounces and you have a deal.”

“Are you sure?”

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“I said it didn’t I?”

“Yes, well...sorry. I’ll get the gold and Kirby and you can load the horses.”

I walked around the other side of the Dodge and quickly slipped 9 ounces from my front pocket. Kirby and the guy loaded the horses and then the tack. The tack was tagged according to which gelding it was sized for. I paid him and he headed to the house.

“That was strange. I was prepared to go 21 ounces if I had to. I’d figure three ounces per horse with tack, initially and you said to bring more. That man is carrying a heavy burden.”

“You can always give him more if you’d like.”

“I probably should but I get the feeling that that would upset him. It was almost like he was just looking for a home for his horses.”

“If we hurry, we might make it back by 11.”

“Won’t we need to stop and tend to the horses?”

“Automatic watering. We tossed some hay for them to chew on.”

“Fine, let’s get this show on the road before he changes his mind.”

o

I later realized that the guy only had 8 horses left, all geldings; which, in turn, led me to wonder if he would really be ok. For all I knew, he might saddle the two remaining horses and go looking for his obviously dead wife. And, why did he ask if I wanted a stallion and mare if all he had was geldings? I didn’t dwell on it because our wives were alive and at the end of the drive. I pulled into my place at 10:30 and Kirby kept going. Randy helped me get the horses into the barn and put down a bait of grain and some hay. The next morning Eve was very excited as she checked on the horses. I told her of our experience the previous day, bringing a frown to her face.

“That poor man.”

“I’ve never seen anybody look that lost before. I had a brief thought on the way back that he might just saddle up the two remaining horses and go looking for his wife.”

“We do grow close when we spend a long time together. Randy said yesterday that every critter on the farm that could get pregnant was.”

“Not Amy, Maria or Susan?”

“No, silly, the livestock. From the looks of things we’re going to have a large herd of Morgans.”

“Not from the ones I brought back.”

“Of course not. But each of our mares that is at the age has been bred. What did Kirby buy?”

“A stallion and five mares.”

“With foal?”

“I didn’t ask and he didn’t say.”

“But...”

“But what?”

“Don’t you ever do something that stupid again. If you do and don’t get killed, I may just kill you myself.”

I think that was the voice of love speaking although I wouldn’t put it past her to do just that if I did what I did again. She had a wicked smile when she said it but the eyes are the windows to the soul. And, she was very, very angry. It was a little stupid, a horse is a horse...

*A horse is a horse, of course, of course,
And no one can talk to a horse of course
That is, of course, unless the horse is the famous Mr. Ed.*

*Go right to the source and ask the horse
He’ll give you the answer that you’ll endorse.
He’s always on a steady course.
Talk to Mr. Ed.*

*People yakkity yak a streak and waste your time of day
But Mister Ed will never speak unless he has something to say.*

*A horse is a horse, of course, of course,
And this one’ll talk ‘til his voice is hoarse.
You never heard of a talking horse?*

Well listen to this.

I am Mister Ed.

We had enough fuel for a while. There was food for five years or more. There were brake pads, hoses, belts and a spare set of tires for all three vehicles. For some time I'd wondered if I/we'd over bought. We didn't even have a tornado come close. When the four bombs went off, I was slightly less concerned. When the others went off, I was close to being happy and when the Chinese attacked the country I was very pleased with myself and Eve.

With our oldest pair of twins only seven, and the stair steps six and five, it would be a while before they moved from the 9422 to the SR-556. It would be even longer before they were using a main battle rifle. I didn't think that rifle actually kicked that much, but I didn't weigh 50 pounds either.

o

Steve came back after he realized that St. Louis was toast and the only place he had to go was Sedalia. He pulled in and was met with 5 people carrying rifles or shotguns. And, the one with the shotgun pointed directly at his head was his wife. Kirby said that Steve just shook his head, turned around and left. I didn't know he was THAT smart. Arrogant yes, but being arrogant doesn't really relate to common sense. To top it all off, it began to snow. Not a flurry, it was close to a full out blizzard. Snow was coming down and the winds which averaged 40mph with gusts to 55mph had the snow landing sideways. And it drifted. Both Kirby's and our place were parallel to the highway along an east west line. The door to our house faced north, directly into the wind. I'd heard that you shouldn't build a house with a north facing door, but that guy couldn't have been a weatherman.

The snow eventually ended and three days later, the wind dropped to the average 10mph. The highway was badly drifted. I didn't plan in going anywhere. Conversation was a different matter.

"Eve, do you know how many times our NOAA radio went off before it was an emergency directly affecting us?"

"Not really but I think you'll tell me."

"The first time was when the four nukes were detonated, the second when those 23 bombs were exploded. Since the North Korean bombs came on the heel of those, it wasn't a second report. The third time was World War Three."

"How can you call it that? I know there were only four belligerents, Russia, China, North Korea and the US. It sure wasn't anything like WW I or WW II. It was over almost before it began."

“Progress is our most important product.”

“I should know that one.”

“General Electric who thoughtfully developed the GE Minigun.”

“I saw a show on the Military Channel and that gun wasn’t a GE.”

“Right, it was a Dillon Aero.”

“Don’t we already have enough guns?”

“My thought exactly. We have a medium fortune invested in guns, ammo and accessories.”

“I don’t want our children to grow up to be soldiers.”

”You’d rather they be cowboys? Willy wouldn’t agree with you.”

“Willy Nelson?”

“Yep. Waylon and Willy recorded *Mamas Don’t Let Your Babies Grow Up to be Cowboys*.”

“That was then and this now. I suspect they’ll get plenty of practice being soldiers.”

“Probably but I wish it weren’t so.”

“We have everything we need. Let’s hope we don’t need it. We could probably switch the older 4 to the SR-556s now and the Browning’s in a year or two.”

We hadn’t put red dot sights on the Rugers. If they were good enough for the military, they would be good enough for our use. They were a close quarters weapon anyway. I thought I’d ended up buying 8; there were only 6 in the second gun cabinet. The dealer had one Ruger in his rifle rack. One day when I was in the store, he sold one and filled the sale with a rifle in the box from the back room. He also sold red dot sights. But 2 rifles and 8 sights? The ACOGs ran about \$700 apiece.

And, come to think of it, I hadn’t bought slings. I called Kirby and he picked me up on the way and when we got to the store, he went around back and 2 knocks followed by 3 followed by 1. That got the door open, then I explained what I wanted, bringing the grin back to the man’s face.

“I sold you several of those already.”

“You did. I forgot to get one for my wife and another for me. I didn’t get any slings and I decided they should all have ACOGs,”

“You, my friend are in luck. I had those 3 point slings waiting to unload them on someone. I normally keep 4 or 5 of the Rugers, but I still have two left. I got in a new shipment of ACOGs a few days before...you know.”

“And I’m sure the price reflects the circumstances.”

“For a casual customer, I’d say yes. Do you have any idea how much you’ve spent in here since you came back?”

“I don’t want to know.”

“How many magazines?”

“Twenty-five 30 round and three Beta-C per rifle.”

“And eight ACOGs and eight slings?”

“That should do it unless you have some Lake City 5.56 on stripper clips.”

“It’s your lucky day.”

I groaned.

“Cash, gold or silver?”

“You still taking cash?”

“I really prefer gold.”

“How much in gold?”

“Let’s see...seven ounces.”

“Done.”

Apparently the guy was valuing gold a lot higher than I was. He was using around \$2,000 an ounce. And, he’d seemed to have run out of 4473s. The ammo was on stripper clips but not in bandoleers, 100 stripper clips to the case. I laid out 7 Eagles and he couldn’t bag the stuff fast enough. He had a 4 wheel dolly and Kirby and I loaded up the M855A1. We checked both rifles and randomly checked 3 of the AGOGs. All was as it should be and we left before he could change his mind. (All three gun shops in Sedalia were also pawn shops.)

We now had 6 geldings with tack and two additional Ruger rifles with accessories and ammo; all for less than what I was prepared to pay for the horses. Was gold worth more than I thought? Had I just gotten lucky? A person makes his own luck so it couldn't be that.

Had anyone told me the day I retired that I'd end up married to the prettiest woman in the world, have six children and end up back on the farm I'd have had them certified. Or, even if they'd told me I end up with 8 times as many firearms as I had that day, I'd have called the paddy wagon. It seemed I had a flair for it, one point three in one million?

We spent a couple of days, putting things together, making adjustments and cleaning when we finished.

When Eve and I turned the older four loose with their Rugers, they had the safety rules, disassembly and reassembly down pat in one day. With the AGOGs, they had the shooting well in hand the second day. Since nothing is perfect (except my wife) the next day we had them using iron sights. That was different and took two days. Next, we had them practice daily, using a standard battle load, seven magazines. I should have bought more ammo.

Towards the end of the process, Kirby stopped by to visit. He was thinking about a trip to Sedalia, but wanted me to go along. He observed the practice session.

"How long have they been at it?"

"A week. I'm going to cut them back to once a week now. I should have bought more 5.56. Why doesn't Paul go with you?"

"He's down with the flu."

"The flu? Not one of those strange varieties we had a few years back?"

"No, just the plain old ordinary seasonal flu. We put him in isolation just in case, but he's better now. Not up to where I'd want him to back my hand."

"You didn't say why you wanted to go."

"My kids have been practicing too, that Francine has burned through a few thousand rounds by herself. We need more ammo."

"I got the impression the dealer would be long gone."

"Marty? Yeah, lit out the next day for the Ozarks."

"Do you have a key?"

“In a manner of speaking, yes. We’ll pay for the stuff...using US greenbacks. Give us a chance to see what he didn’t take with him.”

Kirby’s key was manufactured by Stanley and was 30” long. We got in and looked around. The door to the vault was standing open and the gun cases and racks bare. However, he couldn’t fit in all the ammo, either because of volume or the weight. We loaded the 5.56, 7.62, 12-gauge, .45acp, 9mm, .45-70 and the .45 Colt. The truck was on the frame and Kirby cranked up the manual overload shocks.

I thought the door was toast, but it wasn’t. Kirby closed and locked it sweet as you please. We went to our place first and unloaded ½ of the ammo. Kirby headed for home and I started lugging the ammo to the shelter tunnel. Randy pitched in and in no time it was all safely stowed. Randy had observed the kids getting their shooting lesson.

“We have five adults and one near adult plus six kids, four of whom can shoot. I’d like to suggest we start night watches. Run them from 6pm until 6am in four hour shifts. If we do a straight rotation, people will be on different shifts. We could have five pairs and with four shifts, we’d rotate the shifts to the one following each go around.”

“I don’t know.”

“Your house was broken into in the middle of the war for crying out loud. Someone might come and we could use the warning.”

“Ok Randy set it up. Include Susan and if necessary, teach her to shoot.”

“I’m on it.”

We did hear a little, “It’s not fair” from Amy but Randy gave her the evil eye and she settled right down. I selected my M21. I missed getting night vision, but I was mighty busy at the time. And, have you ever priced an AN/PVS-22? Two cost the same as three 6X Raptors. We didn’t expect much traffic because the roads hadn’t been cleared. Kirby only made it to our place and town because he had on radial tire cable chains and was using 4 wheel drive.

Pulling guard duty is the pits, especially in the cold and snow. If you get warm enough to be comfortable, you tend to nod off. Especially near the end of the ten to two shift. I swear it was the worst. Keeping a youngster awake at that time of night is nearly a lost cause. We limited that shift to the two oldest.

It was also something the opposition knew. First choice was ten to two and second choice was two to six. We had gone a while with no activity and Eve and I began to wonder if we should keep it up. She had the six to ten shift and I followed with the ten to two shift. Around one thirty am I thought I heard an engine sputter to a stop. I brought

the UNS up and could see a pickup with its hot engine maybe a quarter mile to the east. I didn't see any people, but per earlier decision, raised the alarm.

Randy, Maria and Amy were there like a shot. Next came Eve with our other three kids. Susan was staying in the house, she said, keeping an eye on the girls. Randy had a third generation monocle and was scanning the area towards the east.

"I've got 'em. Five bodies, about 300 meters out just inside the fence line."

"Ok, I've got 'em. Easy shot for this rifle."

"Get their attention."

Ka-pfutt.

"One down. The others are looking around. Take another one."

Ka-pfutt.

"They're headed back to the pickup, can you get another one? They're on the run but struggling with the snow."

The Vet – Chapter 12

Ka-pfutt.

“Nice shot. The last two threw down their rifles and are getting pretty far out.”

Ka-pfutt... Ka-pfutt.

“Let’s go collect the weapons, gear and that pickup.”

No two guns were the same. One was an M16A3, another a Bushmaster M4 clone, a third a Mosin Nagant, an original '91 not the '30 model, the fourth had a Winchester model 94 and the last a very nice M1A Loaded model. I decided to give the model 94 and M1A to Susan. The guy had 9 magazines and with what we had she'd be well supplied. In the pickup were two shotguns, both Mossberg 590s. Susan got one of those too. The only handgun was a Ruger Blackhawk with a 6½” barrel but no 9mm cylinder we could find. Another item for Susan.

These people, 4 men and a woman, didn't have much ammo. We took it all and had to tow the pickup back to the house. It wasn't like shooting fish in a barrel, but it was mighty close. The last pair was only ~350 meters away. We stripped the bodies of anything usable and left them where they lay. The ground was frozen and if we could get a little free advertising, so much the better. Maria fixed ranchos huevos for breakfast. We had a lot of eggs on hand.

“Kirby, you listening?”

“What’s up?”

“Need some eggs?”

“Got a bunch?”

“I can give you a gross. We had visitors this morning about one thirty.”

“Did you bury the bodies?”

“The ground is frozen. We left them lay.”

“How many are them?”

“Five. Four men and a woman.”

“Use the UNS?”

“Yes and the M21. I can let you have their leftover guns.”

“Anything worthwhile?”

“The beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Some fair to good and an original Mosin Nagant.”

“The 1891?”

“Yeah the long barreled version. I think it may be original.”

“See ya.”

“That their vehicle?”

“It is. Couldn’t get it to start but they got it this far.”

“Check the gas?”

“First thing. What do you think?”

“Probably needs some ignition parts. That pickup is older than dirt and doesn’t have a computer. Want to go to town and get the parts?”

“Snow packed down enough to get there without trouble?”

“Yeah, no problem. Let’s see the guns.”

“Here you go.”

“I...uh...I’ll take them all. Especially that shotgun.”

“Here are the eggs, eight trays, a gross.”

“I’ll pay for the ignition parts.”

“Don’t be too sure, I intend to replace the brakes, coil, point, condenser and sparkplug wires.”

“I’ll pay for it all, I told you.”

“All that for 150 eggs?”

“No, for the shotgun and the Mosin Nagat.”

“You have 7.62x54R?”

“I can get it. We’ll drop the eggs off on the way. You ready?”

“Let me get my rifle and shotgun.”

I thought we were going to an auto parts store and back to the gun store. Kirby pulled into his place of business.

“Had a pickup just like that one once. Could even be the same pickup. Anyway, we always kept parts ready. Help yourself.”

After I loaded the parts into a cardboard box, Kirby headed to the gun store. This time he had a key.”

“Where did you get the key?”

“Off the spare key rack the last time we were here. You want to just clean him out?”

“Greenbacks?”

“They may be good someday...”

We cleaned him out although there wasn’t all that much to clean out. More bricks of .22, boxes of .357, 7.62x54R, a few boxes of 5.56 and 7.62 we missed the last time. Kirby took the .44 magnum and I wondered if he had a rifle or revolver to shoot it. When I asked he said he had a Marlin 1894 Cowboy and a Super Blackhawk.

I’d never been much of a fan of magnum cartridges. Getting the SP101s in .357 magnum had been a concession. I read a story somewhere about a guy who had a custom built ‘Scout Rifle’ as envisioned by Colonel Jeff Cooper in .350 Remington magnum. It apparently kicked the stuffing out of most people who fired it. Ammunition was a problem too. Remington had discontinued loading the cartridge in 1974 and reinstated it after the turn of the century. I preferred military calibers for a reason...availability.

Randy worked over the pickup, getting it running first and installing the new brakes next. A couple cans of primer and it was in good order. Since his vehicle was still on its last legs but running, I let him keep the pickup. He said that if things ever returned to normal, Amy could have the Toyota.

Things were not going to return to normal anytime soon. Julie needed a new husband and Amy would need one someday in the not too distant future. Julie was divorced in her eyes. She went out on the front porch and said ‘I divorce thee’ three times. Maybe in the Bible...but I’m not sure. She said all that mattered was what she thought; a marriage without love was meaningless. (A Michigan court has overturned a ruling that recognized the Muslim divorce ritual of saying I divorce thee three times to legally end a marriage.)

It wasn't like Steve would be back anytime soon considering how he'd been run off when he came back the first time. Church services were being held on an irregular basis and Julie met a man in church. That's what got her to the front porch. When the minister said something to her about her situation, she replied that Steve was dead to her. Getting a divorce would have required finding Steve to serve and nobody wanted to go looking. He probably already had another one lined up by now anyway. Or, was dead, he'd forgotten to take his guns.

o

If we planted all 160 in canola, we could produce ~20,000-gallons of biodiesel and avoid running up and down I-70. No doubt we'd have competition and it wasn't worth the risk. A biodiesel converter wasn't that hard to make, I had a set of plans. The chemicals might be difficult, but I'd put Kirby on that and we could share the diesel.

Kirby took over the farm to his east and I took over the farm to our west, putting us a mile closer. They were abandoned, the livestock dead and the fields fallow. If I could grow enough canola and get enough canola oil, we could market it. But that meant more processors and more chemicals. Hell, Kirby had plenty of help, he could grow canola too. Most of the canola variety of canola is a hybrid. However, we planted a non-hybrid or heirloom seed, Brassica carinata. Since we held back seed for two seasons, we could plant 320 acres and Kirby could wait a year. It wasn't like we were short on diesel.

The problem with that variety was the excess acid etc. but I thought maybe we could grow two different crops in the 160 and produce our own hybrid seed. There should be a good market for hybrid seed. I had my thinking cap on and realized that I didn't know as much as I thought. If only Mac hadn't retired to the Ozarks.

"Mac, Sally, what brings you up here?"

"What else, the war. Government isn't paying the Social Security. Didn't have as much put back as we thought."

"I was just thinking about you and wishing you hadn't retired. I bought the other 160 and took over the farm to the west of us. I have those two years of canola but I was thinking about using the 160 to produce hybrids."

"I see you have a new hired man."

"There's going to be more than enough work with a full section to farm."

"Old Clyde took off, did he?"

"Don't know. The place was abandoned and the livestock dead. We have more horses as riding stock and the equipment is in good repair."

“We need to get our mobile home up here.”

“Why not leave it there and pick up a new one in town?”

“Doesn’t seem right.”

“I know but there are a bunch of empties just sitting around. It wouldn’t take much to extend the various lines and such. We could even put in telephone in case we ever get service back.”

“We’d still have to go back and get our clothes and things.”

“You do that and I’ll get with Kirby and we’ll pick up a nice mobile home and get it installed. Can you bring that stove you and I installed?”

“Not a problem, harder to put in than to take out.”

“You’ll stay for supper, of course?”

“Guess we’d better, it’s a long drive. Where will you put us up?”

“We’ll move two of the kids for the night. Susan, our nanny, has your old bedroom.”

“Hate to put your kids out.”

“It will be an adventure for them. Twin beds I’m afraid.”

“No problem. I think that Sally and I should go see Eve and meet your nanny and new hired hand.”

“Right. I’m going to call Kirby.”

“Kirby, you there?”

“Now what?”

“Mac and Sally are back. I need a favor.”

“I know just where we can find one identical to the one they bought.”

“Mind reading?”

“Good guess. You’re going to have to give the M1A you gave to Susan to Mac.”

“I’ve got a better idea, Bobs Guns in Jefferson City.”

“Hell yeah, a little over an hour.”

“The reason I called was to invite everyone over to a welcome home feed.”

“What’s cooking?”

“I don’t know, it isn’t even lunch time yet. Maria will no doubt surprise us.”

o

When they showed up it was six, not five,

“New beau?”

“I don’t know what to call him. They’re sharing the same bedroom but we didn’t attend any wedding.”

“If all else fails, just call him by his name.”

“That could get confusing.”

“How?”

“His name is Paul.”

“Simple solution, who is taller?”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“I was remembering a song I heard on the oldies station.”

“So?”

“*Tall Paul.*”

“Before our time.”

“Yeah, way before. Trailer tomorrow or Jefferson City?”

“That trailer isn’t going anywhere and the Paul’s and Randy can put in the utilities.”

“We should be back in time to help them.”

“That depends on what we find in Jefferson City.”

We found 2 Loaded M1A rifles and a Springfield Armory Garand in .308. There were 73 Checkmate Industries M14 magazines and 97 M-16 magazines. The .308 enboc clips were in a sealed box but it said 100 on the box. Add to that a pair of Glock G-21s and a lot of magazines. No shotguns, but plenty of ammo. More than we'd gotten from Marty's pawn shop. We were home before noon. I could get used to this new way of buying guns, no paperwork and the price was right.

They had the trenches dug for the new lines and were just connecting the propane line to the tank. The water line was in, electric was in, septic in and the telephone cable lying on the ground ready to be added to one of the trenches. Kirby and I pitched in and shoveled dirt back into the trenches where the work was done. They decided to put the phone line in the septic trench after it was partially filled in.

By the way, Tall Paul was their son because the new Paul was about 3" shorter. It turned out that there was only one problem with the arrangement.

"Eve, you there?"

"What's up?"

"Julie is preggers."

"Should that be congratulations or an expression of sympathy?"

"That not all, it's catching."

"Not you too?"

"Heavens no, Francine. Sure will be nice to have grandchildren to spoil rotten. Say, you aren't going to have more?"

"Cut and Cauterized. I got diapers if you need them. Sorted out the old ones and kept the good ones."

"Why?"

"Just in case. Although I was about to add them to the rag bag."

"Don't you dare! Say...how is it working out with Mac and Sally?"

"Mac knows a lot more about growing canola than Mark imagined. We should get enough hybrid seed this year to plant everything for two years running."

"Are you still running the night guards?"

“Just Randy, Mac and Mark. Same shift schedule though. Mark has the six to ten, Randy the ten to two and Mac the two to six. You’re guys doing it too?”

“Yeah, Kirby six to ten, Tall Paul ten to two and short Paul two to six. I’ve got to run.”

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“Bye.”

“Joanne called.”

“What’s up?”

“Julie and Francine are pregnant. She asked me if we were going to have more.”

“She didn’t know about the tubal?”

“I never told her.”

“I’m sure I mentioned it to Kirby.”

“That I did or that I was thinking about it?”

“I don’t recall.”

“She said they’d take the cotton diapers I saved back.”

“You know that we really screwed up don’t you?”

“How?”

“We didn’t need to get Mac a trailer; Sally and he could have just taken over the farmhouse on our new property to the west.”

“I like it just the way it is. From a security standpoint we have all of our eggs in one basket. Spreading out could reduce our effectiveness. Ok if I sit with you on guard duty tonight?”

“Sure. Something on your mind?”

“Yes, but that will come later.”

“In the mood are we?”

“I don’t know about you but I sure am.”

“You know we could cut back to just Randy and Mac, but a six hour shift is just too long.”

“The two Paul’s and Kirby are keeping the same schedule as we are.”

“Good, we can concentrate on the eastern approach and Kirby on the western.”

“When is the National Guard or FEMA going to show up?”

“FEMA is anyone’s guess. The Missouri Guard had a Company in Jefferson City. I tried to talk them out of a man portable SINCGARS radio, the 12 volt model. No sale. I’m not about to give up on that just yet, I just have to find the right officer.”

“SINCGARS?”

“Single Channel Ground and Airborne Radio System. They use a slow rate frequency hopping to prevent anyone without the key from intercepting communications. Our ham receiver could intercept the signals until they hopped.”

Even Sarah’s absence had been noted by some. Of course now that I say that, the NOAA radio issued a message saying that she would address the nation on radio at 8pm Mountain time. Mountain time is the time zone where Cheyenne Mountain is located. They didn’t say she was speaking from Cheyenne Mountain; just that the address would occur at 8pm Mountain.

One of the old stories mentioned another bunker location in the same time zone, Holloman ABF. That’s west of Roswell if you’re interested. I was looking forward to the long delayed address. All of our military forces were home and a lot of them must have survived the war despite the Chinese focusing on military installations. And there were the military Reserves and the National Guard. On the state level nearly half had state defense forces.

Missouri law allowed the Governor under Chapter 31 § 490 – *The governor shall have the power to organize from the unorganized militia of Missouri a reserve military force for duty within or without the state to supplement the Missouri national guard or replace it when it is mobilized in federal service. The Missouri reserve military force may be used to execute the laws, suppress insurrections, repel invasion, suppress lawlessness, and provide emergency relief to distressed areas in the event of earthquake, flood, tornado, or actual or threatened enemy attack or public catastrophe creating conditions of distress or hazard to public health and safety beyond the capacity of local or established agencies. The force shall consist of such organized troops, auxiliary troops, staff corps and departments as the Governor deems necessary. The governor shall prescribe the strength and composition of the various units of the same, uniform and insignia and the qualifications of its members, and shall have the power to grant a discharge therefrom for any reason deemed by him sufficient.* (I’ve got a ton of useless files on my laptop.)

I was retired and my records showed I was a diabetic. I should be in the last bunch called back to active duty. There was no way I’d sign up for the Missouri State Defense Force if it were enacted. Plus, I was over 45 and the militia is made up of people between the ages 15-45. Our children were too young, but not so the two Paul’s.

I can't tell you whether my loading of every magazine was due to an abundance of caution or something else. I marked the magazines with gaffer's tape. It might not be the best solution, I'll admit. The color of tape used reflected the color coding on the bullet tips. Ball was plain, AP was black, red was tracer, green was M855A1, incendiary was blue and the anti-material round was green over white.

Eve and I were out and about riding the fence lines a few days later, carrying as usual our Single Action arms. A pickup approached, slowed and passed. I pulled out my business band radio and gave a heads up and we turned back to the house. A half mile beyond sat the pickup, empty of course. I put out a second broadcast giving their approximate position. I heard Randy call Kirby and we dismounted and armed up, each carrying our saddle bags with extra ammunition. We had canvas slings on the coach guns and they went over our backs. I checked both of my revolvers and when Eve finished said, "Let's go, we might get them in a cross fire."

Moments later came the report from the Tac-50. I assumed it was Randy, I had him checked out on the .50 cal. As had happened the first time, the people were grouped up and looking around to find the source of the shot. Eve and I selected targets and took them down. Moments later the big .50 cal boomed a second time and the people realized they were in a cross fire.

That was followed by a flurry of shots indicating to me that Kirby and family had arrived. Even the children were shooting with their SR-556s. The people sought cover but had to settle for concealment. The field they were in was our 35 acres of permanent pasture and it was flat as a pancake. They numbered six this time, the capacity of the Megacab they were driving.

I checked them out and by the time I finished there were no survivors. Harsh? Maybe, but I considered them rabid dogs. They were dumped in the mass common grave we'd dug that spring and a foot of soil topped them off.

This time all had pistols and either a rifle or a shotgun. I wasn't interested in the Russian imports but I did take four of the six handguns. Kirby and his family could fight over what remained. He said they'd keep the rifles for trade goods since they were all SKSs. The shotguns included Ithaca's and 870s, all trench sweepers. I told him fine but that I wanted the 590 back.

"Indian giver."

"Nope, straight-up trade."

It is unclear exactly how this expression came to be, but the consensus is that it is based on Native Americans having a distinctly different sense of property ownership as opposed to those of European ancestry. One theory holds that early European settlers in North America misinterpreted aid and goods they received from Native Americans as 'gifts', when in fact they were intended to be offered in trade, as many tribes operated

economically by some form of barter system, or a gift economy where reciprocal giving was practiced. It is also theorized that this stereotype may have been coined or exaggerated by the conquering European groups to denigrate the native people as dishonest and thereby justify their conquest.

I gave Mac the 590 to go with his new Springfield and Glock. Sally wanted the same and there went the M1As, again. A battle rifle is a full-size rifle designed for military use that fires a high-power such as the US .30-06 Springfield, the German 7.92x57mm, the Russia 7.62x54mmR, or the 7.62x51mm NATO cartridge. While the term battle rifle is usually given to post-World War II selective-fire infantry service rifles such as the H&K G3, the FN FAL, the AR10, or the M14, this term can also include older military bolt-action or semi-automatic rifles such as the Mosin Nagant or the M1 Garand.

We were set for the moment. Two attacks in less than six months left me uneasy. I now think we should have hung the bodies on the fence and attached signs saying 'looter'.

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We next came up with an idea to solve several problems in a single blow. A trip to Sedalia produced fatigues in several patterns. I still had my ABU's plus the ACUs and Randy had his Marpat. The most common uniform available was the ACU. We got enough sets and rank insignia, white tape, etc. to fit out 6 uniforms. I would be a Captain, Kirby a First Lieutenant, Mac a Command Sergeant Major, Randy a Gunnery Sergeant and the Paul's Sergeants. Our plan called for a mixture of truth, outright lies and subterfuge. I borrowed the Beretta 92 and Kirby came up with one of his own.

Each noncom was equipped with a Super Match sans scope. Each of us had four M-67s and we carried 6 M-72s in the vehicle. We drove to Jefferson City, the only location we were sure had a National Guard presence. The plan, such that it was, called for me to take the lead and either the Sergeant Major or the Gunnery Sergeant to follow that lead. We took the Megacab Dodge.

"Can I see some identification Captain?"

"Yes, but allow me to explain. We're elements of the Sedalia Militia. When the Guard didn't show up and civil unrest developed in Sedalia, we took it upon ourselves to form this militia with a goal of gathering a Company sized unit. Follow me so far?"

"Yes sir."

"We're sitting on about 2 Platoons with enough candidates to bring us to Company strength. We're short on several things, HMMWVs, ordnance and uniforms. We're only selecting those with previous military experience. Here's my ID. You can see that it's marked retired. It also shows the rank of E-6, Technical Sergeant. The reason I'm the Captain is because I had more military experience. Still with me?"

“Yes sir.”

“Long story short, I suppose I should speak to your Sergeant of the Guard and get my people with him to iron out the details. We’ll wait.”

The Private got on his radio and a few minutes later, the Sergeant of the Guard showed up. I gave him my ID and reiterated my song and dance. He said that we’d find most, if not all, of what we wanted at Fort Leonard Wood. However, before that could happen, I had to speak with his Company Commander. This time I let the Sergeant explain and I answered the questions posed to me by the Captain.

“Do you have any idea how complicated this is?”

“Pretty much. Six civilians asking for the pass key to Fort Leonard Wood. If you can arrange for two Platoons to maintain law and order in Sedalia, tell me and we’ll go home.”

“If it were only that easy. So far we’ve rounded up six Companies. One is in Independence guarding the ammo plant. The second is in Kansas City, Missouri doing what they can. We have a Platoon in Joplin and the remainder of that Company plus another in Springfield. Of course my Company is here. The other Company is keeping people out of St. Louis. So, tell me what you think you need and I’ll tell you what we can let you have, if anything.”

“Transportation comes first. HMMWVs, preferably M-1114s. Either .50 cal or .30 cal machine guns, one per HMMWV. Rockets, M-72s if available, otherwise M136s. Ammunition including non-lethal rounds plus grenades including non-lethal, smoke, concussion and M-67s. JP-8 if it’s available, but we do have a small supply of diesel. M9s, if you can spare them. Otherwise we’ll provide our own sidearms. Raufoss and M1022 if available. Uh, let’s see...uniforms, we don’t have many that match, with name tape and rank insignia. That should do it.”

“Don’t want much do you?”

“I thought it was rather a lot. Oops, I forgot the SINCGARS, one in each vehicle and two base stations with power supplies and antennas plus C-4 with detonators.”

“Judas Priest. I suppose you want my wife as a companion.”

“Maybe, but my wife would kill me.”

“Sergeant did you take notes?”

“Yes Sir.”

“Type it up and I’ll sign it. You can forward a copy of the requisition down to the Fort. Now Captain the hard part. Raise your right hand and repeat after me.

"I [state your name], do solemnly swear [or affirm] that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of Missouri against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the Governor of the State of Missouri, I make this obligation freely, without any mental reservations or purpose of evasion, and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the Office of Captain in the Army National Guard of the State of Missouri upon which I am about to enter, so help me God."

"You do understand that the oath has no expiration date, do you not?"

"I do."

"For the moment your Company is assigned to Sedalia. That could change, keep that in mind."

When the Captain ran my background through the records he would learn of my near medical discharge. Considering the location of the records (St. Louis), I found that unlikely. Our little scam had worked but in the process I ended up an officer in the MNG. I should have thought that one through a little better.

On the other hand it worked. We got five HMMWVs, all equipped with .50 cal's. We got two fuel trailers and three cargo trailers to carry most of the equipment in. The Dodge was loaded down with boots, uniforms and rank insignia and belted ammo. The trailer attached to the Dodge contained explosives and additional belted ammo. One of these days, all of my conniving would catch up to me.

"Nice uniform, did the charade work?"

"A bit too well."

"In what way?"

"I am now a sworn officer in the Missouri National Guard."

"You're what?"

"You heard me."

"How did that happen?"

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“After the Company Commander agreed to my requests, he proceeded to swear me in. But we’re assigned to Sedalia, for the time being.”

“Huh?”

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“Captain, it seems that your records were lost in the attack.”

“I have my DD-214 if you want to see it. It will contain a note that I had type II diabetes. I overcame that and haven’t been on Avandia for quite some time.”

“Ever get your teat in the wringer for being honest?”

“More than once, I assure you.”

“So, do you have combat experience?”

“Desert Storm and two tours in Iraq. I was stationed at Balad.”

“That Marine...is he any good?”

“I’d trust him with my life. In fact I did once.”

“After consultations with Brigade, none of your men will be sworn in. I got in a bit of hot water for swearing you in. I basically told the truth. I should have lied. What’s your strength?”

“Three Platoons or so close it won’t make much difference. I made the Lieutenant my Adjutant. That’s Company strength, right?”

“It is. It would sure be nice if more people formed local Companies to protect their communities. We aren’t going to fit you out with dress uniforms, it’s ACUs or civvies.”

“My Marine won’t like that,”

“Let him wear his Marpat. It wouldn’t be worth the fight. I see you didn’t pick up any MREs.”

“We have some food.”

“Including MREs?”

“No.”

"I brought you 100 cases for when you're in the field. That's only eight units per militia member. Radio me on the SINCGARS if you need more."

"Yes sir, anything else?"

"I'd normally ask your Company to pass in review. Don't have time for that foolishness. How many aren't veterans?"

"Four."

"Not bad. Are they any good?"

"Very good."

"Was it worth it?"

"I'm sorry, I don't understand the question."

"Captain, I didn't just fall off a turnip truck. You're little scam, was it worth it?"

"Well...in the long run if it doesn't get me killed and if my wife doesn't kill me, it was."

"The first is possible, maybe even probable. I can't speak for your wife."

"As long as we're in Sedalia, it isn't a problem. If we get shipped out to who knows where, it will be a problem."

"What did she say?"

"A bunch of questions, mostly."

"I was going to send you down to Doolittle. That Sergeant Major, previous military?"

"No."

"Is his last name Brown?"

"That's right. Oh, that's who you were sending me down to locate. They left their mobile home at the place near Doolittle and we appropriated a new one for here."

"Saves you a trip. I saw a lot of M14s."

"M1As, not M14s. No bayonet lug on the ones we have. Otherwise, they're pretty much the same. We do have several."

“Good rifle, just not a good jungle rifle. Shortest service record and they’re still around. I think the M-16 is seeing its final days. I’m not sure what will replace it, maybe something designed by H&K, like the XM8 or the XG11.”

Be careful what you wish for... (The H&K G11 series used caseless ammunition where the propellant was molded onto the bullet itself, making the round smaller and much lighter. The new K2 version used in the ACR tests held 45 rounds in a single long magazine lying along the top of the barrel, leading to a distinctive and somewhat blocky appearance.)

We became the de facto law enforcement in the area. While technically assisting local law enforcement, we were further equipped, this time with police radios. Ten times out of nine it was the Sedalia Militia answering police calls on the radio. It wasn’t a big deal, at first. Then someone figured out where the militia members lived and we became targets. Our guns were bigger than theirs in most cases and we had 156 members.

Julie and short Paul got married. And didn’t tell anyone. Kirby became more anxious as the days passed. He really wanted to spout off. Fortunately, he kept his peace. Joanne was the first to notice that the rings on Julie’s ring finger were yellow gold instead of platinum. She confirmed it with Julie but didn’t say anything to Kirby. She was going to let him stew in his own juices. When Kirby couldn’t stand it any longer, he asked Paul when the wedding was scheduled for. Paul’s answer was there was no wedding planned. Kirby went through the roof and Joanne decided she’d better tell Kirby that there was no wedding scheduled because they were already married. I would have liked to have seen the expression his face because the retelling just wasn’t the same.

After months of near peace in Sedalia, a group estimated to number up to 100 began raiding outlying farms. This was the same group who figured out who the militia members were and where they lived. The ones in the country included Mac, Randy and me plus Kirby, and the two Paul’s. Randy caught one of the guys doing a recon and used a few interrogation techniques that Dubya would have been proud of. When they did show up, they were met by all of us.

Walt Disney wouldn’t have cared for this ending, we had 5 KIA and 14WIA. That bunch that attacked would have made him even unhappier, 17 KIA, 37WIA and the remainder prisoners. We called the Captain on the SINCGARS just as the attack began. He couldn’t free up a helicopter or anything except HMMWVs. He strongly advised that my command not take vengeance for the attack. No executions because we were angry. Must have meant it, he said it three times.

If there was any good news, none of our KIAs included anyone from the two farms. Two of the WIAs were however, Mac and Tall Paul. Mac had a nasty gash across his left shoulder extending down along his shoulder blade. Paul had taken 2 rounds in his left leg, one in the thigh and the second in his calf. Susan did what she could starting on Mac first and interrupting his treatment when Paul was hit and began bleeding profuse-

ly. Eve and then Maria pitched in as our wounded mounted, removing two guns from our force.

I don't recall where I heard it, but enemies prefer to wound rather than kill because we, as Americans, tend to our wounded. Lessons learned from the past suggest that some don't; Vietnam comes to mind. We studied that one in History class and there were still many veterans around.

It took the Captain 90 minutes to come from Jefferson City and his force consisted of 6 HMMWVs, 5 personnel per vehicle. Two combat medics rushed to help with our wounded and his HMMWVs combined with ours surrounded the prisoners and WIA.

"Have a bad hair day?" he addressed the prisoners. There was little response besides some nasty stares.

"You are accused for attacking this farm, any denials?" This brought a comment or two that are not for the younger ears and more stares.

"Did you disarm them?"

"Yes we did. Quite the collection of weapons."

"Ok, let's get this over with. Last chance, any denials? No? You people are guilty as charged. Any comments before I pass sentence? One last time. Sergeant do your duty."

The .50 caliber machine guns on the Captain's 6 HMMWVs opened fire, killing the lot. Two Sergeants then passed through the prisoners 'taking care' of the wounded.

"Damn Captain, remind me to never piss you off."

"Major. The standing order is to shoot looters."

"Sir?"

"I've been promoted to Major. Worst damn rank in the military. Got stuck with a Battalion. Good show. Have you gone through their weapons?"

"We haven't even gone through their pockets."

"Do it and take your choice of weapons. Do you have a backhoe or something to dig a mass grave?"

"Yes sir."

"Strip them and plant them. I don't get paid enough for this crap."

The medics had loaded six of our wounded into the back of three pickups for transportation to Sedalia where they could receive more extensive medical care. Randy sorted the weapons into two piles, ours and the Major's. We kept the vehicles, ammunition, accessories and the gold and silver he found in their pockets. The Major's pile contained SKSs, AKs, AKMs, and all manner of foreign junk. Our pile contained good imports, H&Ks, FALs, Steyr AUGs, Glocks and a large number of American arms including Colt, Bushmaster, Smith & Wesson, Ruger and so forth.

"Your fitness report will reflect the outcome of this action, Captain. Don't let it go to your head, you won't get a promotion or any pay. Are you any closer to having your local problems solved?"

"Sorry Major, we won't know for a while."

He saluted me and mounted up to return to Jefferson City. First time I was ever saluted, it startled me and I didn't return his salute. In this Company, we did not salute. We were civilians and getting saluted could get you shot. Tech Sergeants don't get saluted. Had I not developed diabetes and been forced to retire, I would have made Master Sergeant on my next enlistment and probably E-9 before I retired with 30.

"That man is one cold SOB."

"How's Paul?"

"Can't be critical, they didn't load him for transport. Lucky for us you had the medical supplies."

"Luck had nothing to do with it Kirby. Your wife and Doc Miller were responsible for us having the supplies. All I did was sign the checks. We're going to have to replace what we used for the next time."

"The next time? Watch your mouth."

"As my wife once said, the opera isn't over until the fat lady sings. Francine is going to be upset. Maybe you'd better head home and break the news. If Paul is up to it, take him along. It will be better if she has someone to blame."

"She'll blame me first and Paul second. I'm sure there will be enough anger and worry to spread around. I'll get the Paul's and head out."

I figured I was lucky not to get a butt chewing from Eve. That only lasted until she put her finger in a bullet hole in my sleeve. It must have passed through a fold missing me completely. The butt chewing was pretty short, "Idiot."

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Shelia and Stephanie joined Shelly, Bobby, Johnny and Andy shooting the SR-556s. The four oldest graduated to the Browning Hi-Powers. A few more years and they'd be shooting the M1As and PT1911s. And, of course, the 'cowboy guns'. All six were riding but needed a stool to get into the saddle.

Kirby told me that Joanne had given him a harder time than Francine. Then I mentioned the bullet hole in my shirt sleeve.

"Oh, what did she say?"

"She called me an idiot."

"Sleeping on the couch are we?"

"I'm not, you?"

"Been married a lot longer, we don't do that anymore. But, pal, you're up to your hind end in some very deep dodo."

"From one name?"

"One of Eve's nasty expressions. She doesn't suffer fools and idiots."

o

The President remained wherever she was and addressed the nation occasionally. She usually discussed the ongoing cleanup including progress made and failures when they occurred. There was rarely what I would call hard news. According to the amateur net, SSN-21, Seawolf, which had been transferred from Bremerton back to New London had intercepted and sunk 3 ships, leaving a 4th sinking. The ships were a Cruiser and three Sovremenny class destroyers.

My pucker factor went through the roof. The destroyers went down with most hands and the Cruiser was sinking. Those Mk-48 (Mod 7) ADCAPs are something to behold. That put a whole new spin on the state of the world. Russia and the US had avoided a confrontation previously; did this signal a change?

And, what about all the geological problems? The volcanoes around the Pacific Rim were still erupting and Alaska was head and shoulders above what was happening elsewhere. California was still experiencing minor earthquakes waiting for the 'Big One'. The La Brea tar pits hadn't erupted in a new volcano. The New Madrid Fault Zone had a series of minor quakes.

"Got a minute?"

"What's that look for?"

“A couple of things; am I in trouble with you?”

“What do you mean?”

“You called me an idiot and Kirby said...”

“Do you think you’re in trouble?”

“I don’t know; that’s why I asked.”

“You are if you think you are. What else?”

“Uh, so I am in trouble. The Seawolf...”

“The submarine stationed in Bremerton?”

“They moved it back to New London. Anyway, the Seawolf sunk 3 Sovremenny class destroyers and left the Cruiser sinking in the North Atlantic.”

“Russian ships?”

“Yeah. I didn’t get the names of the Destroyers and probably couldn’t pronounce them if I had.”

“But why? After all of this time and we were getting along really good together.”

“Tell me and we’ll both know.”

“Is there more?”

“Not as important. The volcanoes are still erupting and California hasn’t had the ‘Big One’. The cleanup is progressing, more or less.”

“But they signed that new START agreement.”

“It’s only a piece of paper. How are we on supplies?”

“We’ve been canning all we can grow. We’ve been replacing things as they’re used up, that we can get. Shipping has been very erratic since the war. Overall, we’re close to what we had before.”

“We have three more people now.”

“I gave up on Walton and ordered from Emergency Essentials. Other than things we can get locally, I’ve accounted for the three extra people.”

The Vet – Chapter 14

“The shelter is 1,200ft². We have a total of 14 people cutting the space to about 86ft² per person. We’re going to need to change a few things so we have accommodations for all 14. I don’t want to be hot racking if it can be avoided. We need to get the radiation instruments recalibrated. We need to get more prescriptions from Doc Miller and rebuild our medical supplies. We’re good on ammo and weapons.”

“I hope to tell you.”

“Can you get to Sedalia and pick up the local purchases?”

“Personal account or farm account?”

“Farm account. I haven’t received a penny of my retirement pay since the war. Similar to the problem that Mac and Sally had with their Social Security. I’m sure that by now we don’t have much in the way of clothing for the children. Fill that in if you can. Stick with the western stuff, it’ll serve double duty.”

“You’d be surprised what I have put away for our children. However, I’ll go to Sedalia right away. Maybe Joanne will ride along. I’ll take the Dodge and the U-Haul.”

“I keep meaning to return that. Do you want me to get a HMMWV to escort you?”

“I think we can handle it by ourselves.”

Naturally Eve could sign checks on the farm account, she owned half the corporation and was now listed as Vice President. She jokingly asked me that meant she was in charge of vice. At the time, she was pregnant with Shelly and Bobby. I had actually never seen all the clothing that Joanne and she picked on that trip to Sedalia. For all I knew, she could have gotten the children’s sizes of the Walkabout Tasman Drover’s coat with fleece lining and rain slickers. We were, and still are, into Single Action Shooting. Now that they were all riding, that clothing could come in handy.

They were going to have to wait for the .45 Colt firearms. The revolvers were a handful even using cowboy ammo and the rifle had a nice sharp kick. I didn’t want them to develop a flinch which would undermine all we tried to teach them. Thus the slow transition from the .22LR to the 5.56x45mm. I wasn’t totally sure about the Browning’s, but all I could do was give it a shot as they grew older.

Maybe I shouldn’t have mentioned the business about the Seawolf and noted it later. At the moment, 4 ships had been sunk and some people assumed that it was the US behind the dirty deed. It might have flowed better had I gotten everything restocked before I opened that can of worms. I saw some of the writers getting criticized on the forums for getting everything in perfect order before the missiles rained. We had been ready long

before the missiles rained so perhaps we were excluded. I believed those that said it was when, not if.

Several times we thought it was happening and it wasn't. Then the increased geological activity took center stage briefly and diverted our attention. Four nukes slipped across the border undetected? No way! Twenty three devices sneaked by later, absolutely no way! Unfortunately, the facts spoke for themselves. North Korea delivering its weapons using ships? That did make sense, they never could get the long range missiles right. China was everyone's bad boy or perpetrator. Someone has to get it right occasionally.

"We're home."

"I didn't know you left."

"What have you been doing?"

"Well...uh...daydreaming I guess. Need help with the packages?"

"Maria and Sally are both helping. Besides, I got something for you and you can't see it until I give it to you."

"Why not?"

"It's a present and I'm not sure if you'll like it or not. It's something you should have to work the cattle but I've never seen one. Anything new on the world scene?"

"I haven't heard anything. At least we don't have to put up with the main stream media changing the story every time it's reported. How did the stocking up go?"

"We got what we needed. Did that order from Emergency Essentials come in?"

"Uh-uh. Was it due today?"

"Today, tomorrow or the day after. I told you about the shipping problems. I didn't dent the farm account but it may be a little bruised. Got some day old bread for the freezer that we can use for toast and sandwiches."

"Did you get any more of those hams?"

"Joanne and I split all they had. I also got some of those turkey breasts. They were almost as big as the hams. I assumed you'd want to slice one of the hams for ham sandwiches."

"Some bologna would be nice for a change."

"I couldn't waste time reading labels."

“Get the all-beef kosher bologna.”

“If we get back to town before something happens I will. There wasn’t a lot of variety in the stores. I think it was mostly native grown Missouri products with a few exceptions. The hams are from Minnesota and I think the turkey breasts are too.” (Hormel-Austin, MN)

I looked out the window and saw bath tissue, sanitary supplies, paper towels, coffee, tea, spices and multiple bags I presumed were from clothing stores. I couldn’t identify one box, maybe it was the present. Randy was stuck with most of the farming and I helped out by gathering the eggs and milking the cows. I supervised Shelly and Bobby as they hand washed the eggs and placed them in the trays in the cardboard crate.

The whole job picture changed. Rather than experiencing nearly record high unemployment, there was a huge demand for common laborers in each of the strike targets. Farmers were being urged to grow the maximum arable acreage with an emphasis on food for human and animal consumption. Efforts were underway to once again repair the railroads and the barge traffic on the Missouri, Ohio and Mississippi was limited only by the shortage of barges.

Severe rationing of gas, diesel, oil and lubricants was necessary due to the limited supply of raw materials. Biodiesel producers were producing it for less than a dollar a gallon and selling it wholesale for more than \$2.50 a gallon. We produced our first biodiesel that year. The extracted oil was stored in a 20,000-gallon tank and the finished product went into the 20,000-gallon diesel tank. While we still had a portion of the diesel from I-70 we were trying to stay ahead of the curve. Plus when the two tanks were full, we’d still have storage for 26,000-gallons in the tankers.

Saturday and Sunday were minimum work days when we didn’t have anything pressing. Sunday was church and we’d been more regular in our attendance after the war than before. Any major shopping out of town usually occurred on Saturdays. Militia meetings were also held every other Saturday.

This particular Saturday, Randy and I with Kirby and short Paul were going to rearrange the shelter layout slightly. The end result would be 2 bunk rooms sleeping four and 3 bedrooms, one for us, one for Mac and Sally and one for Randy and Maria. Amy would bunk with our girls and Susan would bunk with the boys. It didn’t turn out to be difficult. We removed the drywall and stacked it. Next we disconnected the electrical power to the bedroom outlets and finally we moved the walls. After, we reconnected the electrical, reattached the drywall and taped the joints. The bedrooms only had one lamp each and the pair of duplexes powered the lamp leaving 3 unused outlets. When we moved the walls, we made allowance for a possible 4th bedroom for Amy if she got a boyfriend or fiancé. The framed walls had more or less been detached and moved in place making certain to keep the doors square, cutting the framing as necessary.

The order from Emergency Essentials came in on Monday and we stacked all we could in the generator tunnel and the remainder in the basement tunnel. Monday evening President Palin broadcast the contents of a message of protest received from Russia. It said something to the effect that, absent any hard evidence, they were forced to presume that an American submarine had sunk 4 of their ships. A partial transmission from the Slava class Cruiser was picked up but garbled. The FSB and the SVR must be slipping.

That move by the President made me wonder if she was dumb or dumber. We lived in an open society and rarely did an enemy have to go to extreme measures to get information (with notable exceptions – Hanssen and Ames). Back in 1975, a CIA counterintelligence operative (whatever) reported that the FBI and the CIA both had a highly placed mole. The guy was forced to resign.

To get back on track, we spent Saturday as described. We went to church on Sunday morning and returned home for Sunday dinner. Eve put a half ham and green bean casserole in the oven and had the potatoes peeled and ready to boil. Ham gravy is the best if you use a whisk to avoid getting lumps. After lunch, we all went shooting.

Shelia and Stephanie were practicing with their 9422s and Shelly, Bobby, Johnny and Andy shot both the SR-556s and the Browning Hi-Powers. I took my Tac-50 and my M21 for some precision shooting. Eve took her Super Match and Marlin 1895. While one of us shot, the other worked with the kids.

Had to wonder...if a nuclear war broke out between the US and Russia, would it be called WW IV or WW IIIb? Would anyone pick up on what was moving on the amateur net? Did Russia know the Seawolf had been moved back to the east coast? Were any English speaking personnel with the Russian security services radio amateurs? Lots of questions; no answers.

We were nearly restocked except for the cocoa. I'd learned that it was better than a sleeping pill when I couldn't relax after an especially bad day. I know it's out of context but that old saying candy is dandy but liquor is quicker applied if one considered cocoa to be the candy. On the other hand, I had a track record with diabetes and alcohol was worse for me than a cup of cocoa. But, those damned marshmallows...pure sugar!

Kirby started getting orders for shelters after someone in Sedalia started talking about the amateur band story. He could only get so much concrete from the Ready Mix plant. He said once it ran out, he'd be forced to use block until either the block or mortar ran out. There were all kinds of new preppers and they were stocking up, depleting the stocks in the stores.

The Walton order finally showed up with an amount due. When Eve placed the order, she sent a check. They only began to fill the order when the check cleared which took a long time these days. The postal system was up, barely. While they were waiting, they'd raised their prices and we owed the difference plus the \$50 drop off fee. We couldn't

call them and complain because we had no phones. Then, I checked over the order Eve had written down to make sure we got what we ordered. We didn't.

Eve's list said 2 50# bags of cocoa and they shipped 3. It was now running over \$100 for the 50# bag so it was close enough. Bring it on, we're ready. Do I need to shout? Countries seem to end the world when they want to, not when you're ready. The only answer to that is to stay ready and hope like hell you're not too far from home when your NOAA radio goes off.

Another downside for those of us that survived the war and the aftermath to this point was our loss of Costco. Kansas City wasn't that far away but under the circumstances, it could have been on the moon. Sam's Club was still in the same location and having a devil of a time getting bulk packed retail products. The only remaining mainland US tuna packer was on Terminal Island in San Pedro Bay. So, no canned Kirkland beef or chicken and no canned tuna. We could go down to Truman Lake to fish or the big muddy in Jefferson City. But neither had tuna; canned blue and flathead catfish, crappie and largemouth bass? Nah...

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"I have a message for you. The Major called and wants you In Jefferson City and I quote Right Damned Now."

"Did he say why?"

"It was the radio operator and that's all she knew. Must be big, she had more Company Commanders to call. I called Kirby and he'll be here in a jif."

"Do I have a clean set of ACUs?"

"In the dresser."

"If Kirby gets here before I'm back down tell him I'll be ready in 15. Give Mac and Randy a yell and tell them I want them along."

"On it."

"What's this all about?"

"Don't have a clue Kirby. Maybe that stuff on the amateur band."

"What stuff?"

"I assume Eve told Joanne why we were stocking up again."

"And I thought they were just getting the holes filled in."

“They were. Anyway, the news on the net is that the Seawolf sunk 4 Russian ships.”

“In the Pacific?”

“North Atlantic. The Seawolf was reassigned to New London. Three Destroyers and a Cruiser. President Palin said Russia protested, presuming an American sub sank their ships. That’s why Eve and Joanne went to Sedalia and why I had you help rearranging the shelter.”

“I know that Joanne put an order in with Walton and it got delayed because she paid by check. We were hijacked because they sent the order with a balance due and the drop off charge. We already had 3 bedrooms in our shelter but you now have five.”

“Same thing happened to us. Except, Eve paid for 2 bags of cocoa and they sent 3. Sort of evened it out.”

“Do they say why the Seawolf sunk the ships?”

“Now, that I haven’t heard. I can’t see us attacking Russian ships without a good reason. Off the subject but...I could never understand why they stopped building the Seawolf class and went to the Virginia class when the Cold War ended. They claimed they saved a billion per boat but remember what Dirkson said, ‘*a billion here a billion there, pretty soon you’re talking real money.*’ How much did Bush and Obama spend on the bailouts? Trillions. For a trillion we could have built well over 350 Seawolf class subs. They only planned on a dozen to begin with at 33.6 billion, total. It was the deepest diving and quietest sub at speed we ever built. Had more killing power too. Sucker can dive to 2,000 feet and has double the number of torpedo tubes of our other subs.”

“Know someone in the Navy?”

“It isn’t that. It’s just that the DOD when given a choice always chooses the wrong one.”

When we arrived in Jefferson City, Kirby and I were shown into a meeting room where we had to wait for some time before the other Commanders and their Adjutants filed in. And then we had to wait while the Major got off the radio with Brigade.

“Gentlemen. I just got off the radio with Brigade. Here’s the low down on the Seawolf situation. Apparently, the Cruiser had some new-fangled sonar suite and detected the Seawolf. The 3 Destroyers were sent in to drop depth charges with the Cruiser giving directions. The CO of the Seawolf concluded he had no choice and attacked the 3 Destroyers with ADCAPs. The Cruiser then fired something similar to our ASROC but with a conventional rather than a nuclear warhead. Seawolf fired 2 ADCAPs against the Cruiser and evaded the ASROC. The Cruiser sank, eventually. Apparently they got off a partial garbled message.

“It remains to be seen how the Russians will react to the President’s response to their protest. They have no hard intelligence but only three Navies have the capability of sinking four ships quickly, the US, the UK and France. Apparently the Russians have satellite photos showing the disposition of the French and UK assets and we’re ‘it’. Questions?”

“Yes Lieutenant.”

“Kirby Johnson, sir. Adjutant of the Sedalia Militia sir. I’m a building contractor and have more orders for shelters than I can fill. Apparently the story you just related is on the amateur net except for the reason the Seawolf had for sinking those ships. People are scared sir. How likely is another war?”

“As I said Lieutenant, it all depends on the Russians. Next question?”

After several more questions which closely resembled Kirby’s and some about what to do if another war happened, the Major closed the meeting and dismissed us. As we walked back to the vehicle, I was thinking, “How does a retired Air Force jet engine mechanic end up in charge of a local militia? The logical choice would have been Randy, the former Marine. Me and my big mouth. How did a modest gun collection turn into an armory the size of the one we had now? I picked up almost as much from those attackers as I had purchased and I purchased a lot. Another war...God help us.”

“Kirby, I can answer your question as well as the Major didn’t. That was a simple Commanders briefing. Typical government operation to have people drive for hours when a radio message would have worked. It won’t be much comfort, but it’s like this: Either we have a war with Russia or don’t, fifty-fifty chance. They don’t want one any more than we do. Can you imagine Russia in the middle of nuclear winter? Man, it would be worse than War and Peace. I don’t know if you ever saw the old movie starring Audrey Hepburn, Henry Fonda, Mel Ferrer, Vittorio Gassman, Herbert Lom and Anita Ekberg. Man, talk about snow. Well...it was probably all soap flakes, but you get the idea.”

“I may end up glad that Walton shipped that order.”

“It’s not like it will go to waste. We buy that hot chocolate in 50# bags and used several of the other products if we didn’t have it on hand when we needed it. I have no idea how this will work out or how long it will take. Both parties are going to need to be convinced that they each did the right thing and the other party acted in an appropriate fashion given the circumstances. At least Russia probably has satellite photos of the US and will be forewarned what to expect if we go at it.”

The Vet – Chapter 15

“You’re awfully long winded.”

“Lots going on, probably venting. Randy, you awake up there?”

“I’d better be, I’m driving. Whatcha want boss man?”

“You did two enlistments in the Corps didn’t you?”

“Yeah, so.”

“So I made Mac the Command Sergeant Major and he’s never served a day. Made sense at the time because it was just a scam. Since we’re doing this for real now, it makes sense to have you as the CSM and Mac the Gunnery Sergeant. Unless you can teach him all you know right quick. Mac, opinion?”

“Absolutely Mark. I’m not really all that gung ho on the job anyway.”

“Hey watch that Mac. We Marines are touchy about sharing some of our expressions.”

“Is that where it came from?”

“A Marine Major, later Lt. Colonel, was the leader of Carlson’s Raiders adopted the term. They made a movie about the Makin Island Raid titled Gung Ho and the expression came into popular use.”

“I didn’t know that. Mark, as far as switching ranks with Randy, it’s all the same to me and makes more sense. Heavy load for these tired old arthritic shoulders to carry anyway.”

“Randy, do you agree?”

“All right Mark. Does that mean he has to drive the remainder of the way back?”

“We’ll hold off on the change of command until we get home.”

Besides Gung Ho, there was another expression that dated it somewhat. *Illegitimi non carbrundum*, a form of fractured Latin that translates as “Don’t let the bastards grind you down.” It was the motto of Vinegar Joe Stillwell.

Twenty years in the armed forces and I’d never killed anyone. Retired, married, with a family, I’d been a cold blooded killer from the start. They say it’s common to puke when you kill your first human being. I didn’t. What did that make me? Charge it off to ‘hard times call for harsh measures’? I had blood on my hands and ACUs after that large

group of raiders attacked. Didn't even notice until after Eve saw hole in my sleeve. I really preferred my jeans, boots, shirt and Stetson to this uniform I had on at the moment.

After we got married, Eve and I spent enough time with our single action revolvers, using live ammunition, to well and truly ventilate paper silhouettes; first with cowboy loads and later with full power loads. It was fun, serious play acting. She had me shaded by maybe 0.05 second and was slightly more accurate. The .45 Colt cartridge was fairly powerful, a fact recognized when the US military had been forced to put away their .38s in favor of the SAAs during the Moro Rebellion.

When it came to the Super Match rifles, especially my M21, I was head and shoulders above her ability. Long hours of practice, but never good enough to actually compete. This kind of work was where 0.5MOA either way usually didn't matter except at long ranges. A shot at center mass at 1,000 yards would, at most be off 5" and certainly a disabling shot if not fatal.

Given time to analyze what the Major had told us, I figured that Russian action would be a long time coming, if it came at all. My reasoning assumed both countries wanted to avoid an all-out confrontation and there would be substantial communications between the parties in an attempt to avoid that very thing. Considering the conversation driving back to the farm, I was even more certain. There could be a war, but would there be a war?

"What a waste of time. It amounted to a 5 minute briefing. However, the incident involving the Seawolf revolved around some new type of sonar they have on their Cruisers. The Seawolf got picked up by the Cruiser and it sent the 3 Destroyers to sink the sub. They dropped depth charges but Seawolf evaded and sunk the Destroyers. The US Commander then put two fish into the Cruiser and departed the scene with the Cruiser eventually sinking.

"The Russians concluded that only the US, UK and France had the capacity to pull that off. The UK and France were eliminated because all of their assets were accounted for. It could work out or result in another nuclear war. So, I want to keep our supplies up. If you would, make up a short list of the things we use out of our LTS food supply and order them from Walton. Check that; make the list and Kirby and I will drive up to Idaho and pick the stuff up. If there is anything we're likely to run short of, add it to the list. We can't write quickly or call so this is the only way. I think it's about 1,150 miles, give or take. Kirby and I can switch off driving and drive straight through.

"If by chance they're shut down, we drive down to Orem and pick up as much of the things on the list from Emergency Essentials as they have. While we're gone, I'd suggest that Joanne and you get even more sanitary supplies. Keep in mind that you'll need to provide for yourself, Maria, Amy and possibly Susan depending whether she's gone through the change."

"Are you sure you want to go a minimum of 2,300 miles total for a few supplies?"

“It might be our last chance to get some things Eve. I’ll take gold, silver and cash. Won’t know until we get there if they’re open or have any stock. I’ll make it a point to ensure Kirby and I are well armed with 2 complete sets of weapons, extra ammo, the rockets and grenades. Maybe the Tac-50. I’ll take a mobile amateur and two transportable 20 and 40 meter collapsible verticals. I’ll leave the two frequencies we’ll be using and you can call us from time to time. Try each evening around 8pm. Don’t be surprised if we don’t reply.”

“We don’t have collapsible antennas.”

“We will before we leave. The radio will be just another knee knocker in the Dodge. We’ll probably haul that U-Haul while we’re at it. I’m going to take 10 cans of diesel, just in case. If we have to go on to Orem, I’ll make it a point to call.”

Eve told me where Kinkaid stored the antennas in the store. Kirby and I found the collapsing antennas and some lengths of coax with connectors installed. We returned home and mount the antennas. Power leads were prepared out of heavy gauge braided copper wire. For a ground, I took a piece of rebar and used a hose clamp to connect a length of heavy gauge braided copper wire. The DC power supply went in the basement for later use. When we were done, everything checked out fine and we did a QSO between the truck radio and the shelter radio. This had been the first time I’d had to check the TS-2000 installed in the truck.

After packing those things I was going to take, I got the list from Eve and went to the shelter to get gold, silver and cash. We turned in early because it would be a long trip and even longer if we had to drive down to Orem. I had two changes of clothes plus extra underwear and socks. The weapons and ordnance were in the truck. We had the 500R survey meter along, just in case.

I was up at 5:00 the next morning and got cleaned up. Eve had an omelet and toast ready and had prepared a small can of orange juice. She filled the ½ gallon Aladdin thermos with Folgers after warming the inside with boiling water. The Taurus went into my tanker holster; the six-guns on my waist, the Laredo Bowie got a few licks from my finest stone. She handed me the SP101 and two double holders for the speedloaders. Eve prepared two very large travel mugs of coffee to get us down the road a ways. While waiting for Kirby, I added 5 more cans of diesel.

Kirby pulled in and we left, towing the U-Haul. We headed towards Chillicothe and turned west to St. Joseph, crossing the border there. We followed US 36 until we were west of Lincoln and turned north to pick up I-80. We’d stop along the road for a call of nature and sometimes use a rest area or the facilities in an abandoned service station. Kirby had his universal key. We also traded off driving, changing at the nature calls.

"I don't really believe we're going to have a major problem until we're approaching Cheyenne, Kirby. Those Chinese would have hit the area pretty hard during the war. I talked to the delivery guy for Walton and he told me Cheyenne was clear."

"How do we get to Montpelier?"

"I-80 to Green River where we'll pick up 30 and take that right into Montpelier."

"And if we have to go to Orem?"

"We'll take 89 to I-15 and take that down to Orem. Going back from Montpelier would just be a reverse course. Going back from Orem we'll take 189 to 40 to I-80 and it'll be a reverse course from there. There's an atlas for when we get lost."

"Make a pit stop and I'll take over driving."

"On the road or do you need facilities?"

"Facilities would be nice."

"Next one then."

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Passing through Wyoming on I-80 is the pits. It has to be one of the loneliest stretches of road in the country. We made it to Montpelier without trouble of any kind. It wasn't hard to find the place and there were people there.

"Help you?"

"Just a small order to fill in a few things, providing you have them."

"Have a list?"

I handed him my list and Kirby handed him his.

"We have most of this for sure. I'll have to check one or two items. No plastic, no checks, no cash. Gold or silver only. Can you handle that?"

"I can."

"Yeah, me too."

"Ok, you have 6 bags of cocoa on your list and we only have 5. Don't know how that happened. Everything else on the list is available. Prices are double what was shown on our last price list. We are allowing \$2,000 an ounce for gold and \$40 an ounce for silver."

You load your own as it's placed on the loading dock. Let me run the total so you will know if you have enough to pay for the order. We can't get replacements for over 95% of what we sell so if you have the gold, get it while the getting is good. Give me a minute."

"Ok, cocoa man, 6.7 ounces, you, 4.8 ounces."

"Let me have 2 50# bags of pinto, great northern, navy, kidney, lentils, 4 25# bags of small pink, 8 25# bags of white rice and 1 50# bag of cheddar cheese powder. Kirby?"

"On your mixes, meals and soups, one of everything except the scones."

"That it? Ok, they're putting stuff out. I add it up again and you load. That guy over there with the rifle is to make sure you don't take off without paying."

Yeah right. I was wearing 5 handguns and had a M-67 in my pocket. If I wanted to leave without paying, one guy with a rifle wasn't going to stop me. But, when he gave us the new totals, Kirby and I counted out gold and silver and paid him. He couldn't make change and threw in bag of brown rice for each of us. So far, so good. We stopped in Green River and refilled the tanks from the diesel cans. It was 7:45pm by my watch so I set up the radio and set it to the 40 meter frequency.

"Mark, are you there?"

"Hi Eve. Walton was open and I got everything except one bag of cocoa. Picked up extra beans, rice and cheese powder. If the return trip is as smooth as the trip out, we'll be home soon."

"You be careful. Joanne's here and wants to talk to Kirby for a minute. See you soon."

I stepped away and could only hear Kirby. Several, I wills and a few yes dears. He told her we'd probably stop later and get a good night's sleep before finishing the trip home. After stowing the radio gear, we headed east. I spotted a likely looking truck pull off and we stopped for the night. We tilted the seats back slightly and nodded off.

The sun coming in the windshield woke me and I nudged Kirby. We drove to a place with facilities and then washed up with water from a 5 gallon can and had an MRE. Thirty minutes later, we were headed home. The return trip was as uneventful as the trip out and we pulled in late having decided once in Missouri to divide up the supplies the following day. Eve was waiting up for me and had a pot of French Market.

"This is good. It's been a while."

"I'd been keeping it for special occasions but we found some in a different store and Joanne and I cleaned them out. We got the supplies you mentioned. In fact, we found an area that was abandoned and hadn't been looted. Well, not until we got there. Filled a

pickup and U-Haul and ended up making 3 additional trips. Plenty of French Market now. You don't have an M-25 do you?"

"Springfield M-25 White Feather? No I don't."

"Well, you have one now with a real quality scope mounted on it. A Schmidt and Bender. You also have a second .50 caliber rifle, a Barrett model 95 with the Leupold scope and the BORS. Didn't want it laying around for someone to take and use against us. Barrett ammo too. Too many things to remember at the moment. How did you do?"

"In addition to what was on the list, I got 2 50# bags each of pinto, great northern, navy, kidney, lentils, 4 25# bags of small pink, 8 25# bags of white rice, 1 25# bag of brown rice and 1 50# bag of cheddar cheese powder. Anything happening around here besides your expert shopping?"

"The Major called, in person no less. I explained that you were out of town and Kirby was with you. He asked for the CSM and I got Randy on the radio. I think he was expecting Mac, but Randy explained it to his satisfaction. Whatever he wanted to tell you, he told Randy but Randy wouldn't tell anyone."

"One more cup, then it's a shower and off to bed. I could sleep for a year."

"You didn't stop?"

"One night, in Wyoming, on the way back. Kirby will be around tomorrow to get their things."

The hot shower felt good and I put on a clean T-shirt and boxers and crawled into bed. I believe I was asleep before my head hit the pillow. Over the course of my 20 years, I pulled some really long shifts, even through a mortar attack once. But, we knew we were in the middle of insurgents. That trip to Montpelier and back was a total unknown. Was there a road block or ambush just around the next curve in the highway? If so, what did they want? Would we have the wherewithal to defeat people with less than our best interest at heart?

Fortunately, we didn't have to find out. I was up early and had everything into the shelter before the sun came up. Randy came to the house after finishing chores.

"The Major was looking for you."

"So I've heard. Did you get the change of places with Mac explained to his satisfaction?"

"Apparently. He said it made more sense for a jarhead, his words, to be CSM than a civilian. Now what he wanted to tell you or Kirby was that negotiations are ongoing but have hit a snag. It seems they had one of those new boomers of theirs in the area, in transit. They heard the Destroyers dropping the cans and the torpedo hits from the

Seawolf. Then they heard the sound of the ASROC hitting the water and the torpedo hits on the Slava class Cruiser.”

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“That supports what we heard.”

“He said that. However, their Cruiser didn’t carry ASROC or their equivalent, only their Destroyers do. That class of Cruiser has plenty of missiles, torpedoes and guns but no ASROC. They do have the RBU-6000 Smerch-2 which is like our old hedgehogs. See where that puts us?”

“Yeah, that means that the Seawolf skipper sunk a ship that wasn’t firing on him. And the Russian want their pound of flesh?”

“Exactly. Not bad for a flyboy. They’ll settle for a payoff, in gold. They want the cost of the ship, including the refurbishment costs, and compensation for everyone onboard.”

“Did you get a figure?”

“Doesn’t matter. President Palin turned them down. She said something to the effect that the Cruiser was part of the action because it was the sonar suite on the Cruiser that was directing the attack. By the way, Slava is the class, the ship was renamed Moskva.”

“And?”

“We’re at DEFCON 3.”

“So except for it being formalized, we’re in the same condition as we were when Kirby and I left for Idaho.”

“Same stuff, different day. Trip go ok?”

“Good trip. We didn’t see another vehicle on the roads there and back. Jacked their prices some, but we essentially got what was on the lists and a little more. Some beans, rice and cheese powder for macaroni and cheese. Did Eve show you or tell you about the rifles she got me?”

“When I wouldn’t tell her what the radio call was about, she didn’t have much to say about what she and Mrs. Johnson found. Must have been a lot, they made several trips. So, what did she get you, a Buntline Special?”

“Better, a Springfield M-25 with Schmidt and Bender scope and a Barrett model 95 with the Leupold scope, BORS and ammo. Damn, I didn’t ask how many magazines, but she would have gotten all they had.”

“You should be good on M1A magazines.”

“We are. I was talking about the 5 round Barrett magazines. You’d better get checked out on the Barrett.”

“It isn’t as accurate as the Tac-50.”

“The Tac-50 is guaranteed 0.5MOA, the Barrett 1.5MOA.”

“Make a good payload rifle.”

“Right, with a target as big as a vehicle, it won’t make much difference. You can use the M1022 for practice and Mk211 for vehicles. That M1022 is match grade, might work for some human targets.”

“Man oh man, I don’t want to find myself in that position. Stop and think what it might mean... things have gone to hell in a hand basket if we find ourselves in that position.”

“World War IIIb.”

“You think it will go nuclear?”

“I don’t know; I sure hope not. We’re going to have to wait and see.”

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Apparently some of Russia’s leadership was familiar with War and Peace. It was, after all, a Russian novel written by Leo Tolstoy. And, they had the satellite photos of the US giving them an inkling of what a nuclear war could cause. Add to that the satellite photos of the Middle East and China and they began to sue (beg) for peace. Given the circumstances, the President agreed to a nominal (small) settlement for the relatives of those lost in the sinking’s. We avoided WW IIIb/WW IV, at least for now.

Eventually civilian law and order was restored to Sedalia and Missouri. In 2020, a Democrat was elected to the Presidency and the party resumed a scant majority in Congress. Mac and Sally returned to Doolittle and Randy and his family stayed on with us. Fortunately, as our children grew up they were able to take over chores and lend Randy a hand.

We rebuilt the diesel engine on the generator once and it was due for a second rebuild when the electricity was restored. Phone came back soon after the electricity. Eventually government payments resumed and after what seemed like an unreasonable period, the missed payments were paid, without interest.

My diabetes had been in check for several years, but as I grew older it returned and I went back on medication. We took all of our collected brass and sold the Berdan primed as metal and had the Boxer primed reloaded when powder, primers and bullets became available. Brass was somewhat precious and was melted down and recycled.

I took to rereading all the PAW fiction I had copied and downloaded over the years before the war. As I said, I had many files on my laptop. I had copied them to the home network so I would still have a copy if one of the computers went down. The home network now consisted of a Dell server and 8 desktops, also Dell. The blade server had a RAID 50 system and we had replacement drives and cards. We scored a large quantity of large disk drives in Columbia and held onto them for dear life.

That's our story, just one of many. We did whatever the situation called for until we began to return to normal. Some of the real upsides were the production of biodiesel from canola (canola) oil. By producing canola we could also consume a portion as vegetable oil. But, that didn't come until around 2018 or 2019 when the hybrid seed was available again. Our efforts to produce a hybrid seed worked, but we didn't produce the kind of hybrid we wanted and the oil was extracted and converted.

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